

Introduction to “relative truth”

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1 Standard Semantics

In standard (Kaplan-style) semantics, propositions are true or false, contradict each other or stand in the entailment relation only relative to a circumstance of evaluation (Montague 1973; Kaplan 1973).¹ This being so, the following meta-linguistic claims are not strictly true.

A proposition and its negation contradict each other

A proposition and its negation cannot both be true

John is hungry and *John is hungry now* stand to each other in the entailment relation

Nor are meta-linguistic claims such as ‘the proposition that Socrates was a philosopher is true’, ‘what John asserted at 3 o’clock on January 15, 2002 is false’, and ‘Since John said that it’s raining on January 15, 2002, and Mary said that it’s not raining on January 15, 2002, John and Mary disagree about whether it is raining on January 15, 2002’. There are two reasons why such talk, in standard semantics, would be at best loosely true (see also Glanzberg’s contribution to this double issue). Firstly, standard semantics does not assume that utterances of sentences make implicit reference to worlds (A), and secondly, standard semantics does not assume that there is only

¹ For defenses of related semantic theories, see e.g., Salmon (1986, 1989, 2003). For a defense of the Fregean camp, see e.g., Chalmers (2004, Manuscript a, b).

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one (concrete) time and only one (concrete) world (B).² Since sentences do not make implicit reference to worlds, the propositions expressed by such sentences at a context of use do not have worlds as constituents. Accordingly, one and the same proposition can be true at one world and false at another. Or at least this is so, if indeed there is more than one world. But since standard semantics does not assume otherwise, proposition truth in standard semantics is a relative concept.

When I say that standard semantics does not assume otherwise, I do not mean to suggest that *standard* semantics does not quantify over worlds in the meta-language. It certainly does, and we have just seen a case of that. But it is at least commonly believed that such commitment could be gotten rid of or paraphrased away should it turn out to be unwarranted. Proponents of standard semantics leave it to metaphysicians to work out these issues.

We can dispose of relative truth. We can build worlds into propositions. On this proposal, the sentence ‘John is happy now’, as asserted by me just now, would express the proposition that John is happy at the time of speech t at the actual world @ and not the proposition that John is happy at t . Or we might reject the assumption that one can do semantics without metaphysics and insist that there is just one world and one time. We can then say that ‘John is happy’, as asserted by me just now, is true simpliciter. There is much to be said for either suggestion, but neither is in agreement with *standard* semantics.³

Since truth is a relative concept in standard semantics, ‘the proposition that Socrates was a philosopher is true’ and ‘what John asserted at 3 o’clock today is false’ are, strictly speaking, semantic non-sense. What we should say instead is that the proposition that Socrates was a philosopher is true at the actual world, and that what John asserted at 3 o’clock today is false at the actual world.

Truth simpliciter also plays a role in standard semantics. Propositions are true or false only relative to worlds and times.⁴ But utterances (also known as ‘sentences-in-

² On a view which Ted Sider calls ‘Williamsonian Passage’, there is just one concrete time but numerous abstract times which were or will be concrete. I shall assume with Sider that there is no need for temporal indexing, given Williamsonian Passage. I do have one worry about this assumption, however. Williamsonian passage validates the temporal version of the Barcan formula: $P(\exists x\phi)$ entails $\exists x(P\phi)$. But consider now ‘it once was the case that there is a time t which will never be 4:24 p.m. January 28, 2007, central time and dinosaurs exist at t ’ entails ‘there is an x such that it once was the case that x is a time, and x will never be 4:24 p.m. January 28, 2007, central time [the present time] and dinosaurs exist at x ’. If the values which satisfy the predicate ‘is an x such that it once was the case that x is a time, and x will never be 4:24 p.m. January 28, 2007, central time and dinosaurs exist at x ’ are times, then *the present time* is not the only time that is present. But consider now the proposition that Ted is sitting. If it is true at all, then it is true relative to the present time and not relative to values which satisfy the predicate. So, it would seem that temporal indexing is required.

³ While linguists tend to treat the tenses as object-language quantifiers over times (King 2003), they do not typically treat modal operators as object-language quantifiers over worlds.

⁴ As MacFarlane makes vivid in his contribution to this issue, it is compatible with standard semantics that there are further parameters in the circumstances of evaluation, for instance, count-as parameters, location parameters (Kaplan 1973), and standards of precision parameters (Lewis 1980; King 2003). King (2003) argues that there cannot be times in the circumstances. We shall set aside his objections to Kaplan here.

contexts' and 'occurrences of sentences') are true or false simpliciter.⁵ The following dictum is a theorem of standard semantics:

Absolute Truth: Utterances are true or false simpliciter

A sentence *S* when uttered in context *c* is true simpliciter iff the proposition expressed by *S* in *c* is true at the circumstance of evaluation determined by *c*. A circumstance of evaluation is determined by a context iff the parameters in the circumstance are also parameters of the context. So, when I say 'John is hungry', my utterance is true or false simpliciter, even though the proposition expressed by my utterance is not.

That utterances are true or false simpliciter is a good thing, for (prima facie at least) if we gave up on that hypothesis, queer things would happen to the practice of assertion. As Robert Stalnaker (1978) argued, the purpose of assertion is to contribute a true proposition to a common ground. So, when I say 'John is hungry' the aim of my assertion is to contribute a true proposition, namely the proposition that John is hungry, to a common ground. But my aim is not to contribute a proposition that is true relative to some non-actual or non-present circumstance. My aim is to contribute a proposition that is true relative to the circumstance determined by the context at which my utterance was made. And that requires that the circumstance of evaluation determined by the context at which my utterance was made has some sort of privileged status. My utterance is true iff the proposition expressed by it is true relative to it.

2 Relativistic Semantics

However, standard semantics runs into difficulties—difficulties which have led a number of authors to reject the assumption that utterances are true or false simpliciter, and hence have led them to reject standard semantics, in favor of what has come to be called 'relativistic semantics'.⁶ In standard semantics proposition truth is relative, but utterance truth is not. Non-relative truth is defined in terms of relative truth in the following way. An utterance *u* made in context *c* is true iff the proposition expressed by *u* in *c* is true at the circumstance of evaluation determined by *c*. The circumstance determined by the speaker's context is thus a privileged circumstance: it is the circumstance to look at when determining whether the utterance is true or false.

Since utterances, if true, are simply true, and if false, simply false, given standard semantics, they cannot have different truth-values at different times or at different worlds. '*u* is false but was true' requires for its truth that *u* is true at one time but false at another. Likewise, '*u* is false but could have been true' requires for its truth that *u* be true at one world and false at another. As this can't happen in standard semantics, '*u* is true but was false' and '*u* is true but could have been false' are necessarily false, or meaningless. In short: in standard semantics utterances are not the sorts of entities

⁵ Kaplan (1973) disapproves of talk of utterances because utterances are temporally extended, but we can set aside his objections if we stipulate that 'utterance' is short for 'sentence-in-context'.

⁶ For defenses of relativistic semantics, see e.g., Kölbel (2002, 2003, 2004, Manuscript), MacFarlane (2003, 2005, Manuscript a, b), Egan et al. (2004), Richard (2004), Lasersohn (2005), Egan (forthcoming), Gillies and von Fintel (Manuscript a, b). For objections, see e.g., Stanley (2005a, Chap. 7).

that can stand in a (non-redundant) true-at relation; they have the truth-value they do timelessly and necessarily.

But that leads to trouble. Consider the following argument (let u be any utterance):⁷

u is true
 u means p
 So, p

Intuitively, this argument is valid. But it cannot be if standard semantics is right. Suppose some propositions are temporally neutral, i.e., capable of having different truth-values at different times, as Kaplan (1989) argued. And suppose u is my utterance earlier today of ‘I am hungry’. I was hungry earlier today but I am not hungry now. u is then true. As my utterance ‘I am hungry’ means that Brit is hungry, u is true, and p is false at the time of speech, the premises of the argument are true, and the conclusion false at the time of speech. Bad news. Suppose, instead, that propositions are eternal, or timelessly true or false, as Frege (1979) argued. Let u be an utterance by me at t in a non-actual world w of ‘I am hungry’. I am hungry at t in w but not at t in @. So, u is true. u means that Brit is hungry at t . But I am not hungry at t in @. So, relative to the current speech situation, the premises are true and the conclusion false. Bad news.

Perhaps saying that (A) is invalid is not a big bullet to bite. For perhaps our intuitions about arguments involving names of utterances do not go very deep. So let’s make matters worse (see Egan et al. 2004; MacFarlane Manuscript a). Suppose I assert the following sentence on December 24, 1990:

(1) Fermat’s Last Theorem might be false

Since it is compatible with what we know in 1980 that FLT is false, it would seem that my utterance of (1) is true. Once true, always true. So, my utterance is true now. When looking back, however, it seems that my utterance is now false. After all, it is no longer compatible with what we know that FLT is false.

We can perhaps avoid this problem by assuming that the modal operator ‘for all we know, it might be that’ contains an implicit time parameter. The idea would be that an utterance of (1) is elliptical for what we might have made explicit in uttering (1) but didn’t, for instance ‘It might be in 1980 that FLT is false’. But this is unlikely to help. For consider my utterance of (1) made in 2006 in some non-actual world w . w is much like the actual world except that FLT still has not been proven true by 2006. So, my utterance of (1) in w is true. Because utterance truth isn’t relative, my utterance isn’t true-at- w , except in a redundant sense (Kaplan 1973, pp. 503–504, note 28). It is true simpliciter. Yet a 2006 utterance of (1) doesn’t seem true simpliciter. It seems true at w but false at the actual world. But it isn’t false at the actual world; it is timelessly and worldlessly true; and hence, true here and now.

What is going on? Here is a preliminary diagnosis. In ordinary speech utterance truth appears to be relative (in a non-redundant sense); yet in standard semantics, relative utterance truth cannot be had.

A final example to illustrate (see MacFarlane 2003, Manuscript b). The chair tells us that there will be a faculty meeting tomorrow. As it turns out, however, the future

⁷ The argument is due to J. Hawthorne (Personal Communication).

is genuinely open. So, there is one set of possible futures where everything goes as planned, and there is another set of possible futures where something goes wrong: the chair gets sick and cancels, the building burns down, president Bush decides to pay the university a visit, there is an unexpected July snowstorm, or what have you. Since the future is genuinely open, the chair's announcement today of 'there will be a faculty meeting tomorrow' is neither true nor false.

It is now tomorrow. We are sitting around the table in the seminar room. The chair is talking. You are bored. You interrupt (loudly): your utterance yesterday of 'there will be a faculty meeting tomorrow' wasn't true, and it isn't true, and it didn't turn out to be true. The chair is chocked, not just by the unexpected interruption, but also by the outrageous falsehoods that it seems to him that you have just expressed. Yet standard semantics is on your side, not the chair's. For given standard semantics, utterance truth isn't relative in any non-redundant sense; as the chair's utterance yesterday was neither true nor false, it cannot become true or false today where we are having a faculty meeting.

These sorts of considerations have led a number of philosophers and linguists to conclude that the best strategy is to give up the Absolute Truth assumption: the assumption that utterances are true or false simpliciter. The result of giving up the Absolute Truth assumption is relativistic semantics (but see Egan's contribution to this double issue).⁸

Standard semanticists and relativists agree that proposition truth is relative. A proposition isn't just true or false simpliciter; it is true or false only relative to a circumstance of evaluation. But the relativists go one step further. They reject the Absolute Truth assumption. Just like propositions, utterances aren't true or false simpliciter; utterances are true or false only relative to an evaluator's perspective. So, within relativistic semantics, it makes sense to speak of an utterance being true at one point of evaluation but false at another. Some relativists (e.g., MacFarlane 2005) distinguish contexts of use from contexts of assessment.⁹ Given this terminology, a context of use is a context in which a sentence is uttered (or an utterance made), and a context of assessment is 'a situation in which a (past, present, or future, actual or merely possible) utterance of a sentence might be assessed for truth or falsity' (MacFarlane 2005, p. 18). What matters, however, is that utterance truth is treated as genuinely relative.

Treating utterance truth as relative enables us to avoid the aforementioned difficulties, as these are closely tied to the Absolute Truth assumption.¹⁰ To illustrate, consider again argument (A).

u is true
 u means that p
 So, p

⁸ Brogaard (forthcoming a, b, c) argues that accommodating the relevant natural-language intuitions requires less drastic changes to standard semantics than is assumed by the relativists.

⁹ Kölbel (2002), Egan et al. (2004), Lasersohn (2005), Boghossian (2006), Wright (2006), and Egan (forthcoming) seem to make do without this distinction.

¹⁰ For solutions to other problems, see e.g., Kölbel (2002), MacFarlane (2003, Manuscript), Egan et al. (2004), Lasersohn (2005), Boghossian (2006), Wright (2006), Egan (forthcoming), and the contributions to this double-issue.

The problem for the standard semanticist is that it might be that u occurred in the past or in some non-actual world. If it did, then the premises in (A) may be true and the conclusion false at the time and world of speech. Let us suppose propositions are temporally neutral, and let u be my true utterance at t^* of ‘I am hungry’, and let p be ‘Brit is hungry’. Relative to the current speech situation, u is true, u means that I am hungry, but I am not hungry.

If we reject the Absolute Truth assumption, however, this unfortunate result is not inevitable. For if we give up Absolute Truth, it is open to argue that utterances are true or false only relative to a time and a world determined by an evaluator’s context.¹¹ But now, as ‘ u is true’ is true relative at a time t and a world w only if u is true at $\langle w, t \rangle$, the first premise in (A) is true at $\langle @, t^* \rangle$ only if u is true at $\langle @, t^* \rangle$. As I am not hungry now, the first premise in (A) is false at the current time of evaluation. So, it hasn’t been established that (A) is invalid. Rejecting the Absolute Truth assumption thus seems warranted.

An interesting question, therefore—and one that is addressed implicitly or explicitly by several of the essays in this double issue—is whether we should reject the Absolute Truth assumption introduced by standard semantics.

3 Contributions

We will close with a brief précis of each of the essays featured in this double issue.

3.1 Context and semantic content

Contextual semantics has gained currency in recent years, not only in philosophy of language (Stanley and Szabo 2000; Stanley 2002, 2005a), but also in epistemology (Cohen 1987; DeRose 1995; Lewis 1996; Greco forthcoming) and ethics (Harman 1975; Dreier 1990, see also Hales’ and LCM’s contribution to this issue). If a particular expression is context-sensitive, in the standard sense, its semantic contribution varies with the context of use. For example, if ‘know’ is a context-sensitive expression, ‘know’ will contribute different knowledge relations to truth-conditions in different contexts of use, depending on which epistemic standards are in place in the context in question. Epistemologists such as Cohen (1987), DeRose (1995), Lewis (1996) and Greco (forthcoming) can be seen as proponents of this thesis.¹² As standardly construed, contextualism is indexical in the sense that it models the semantics of context-sensitive expressions on the standard treatment of indexical expressions such as ‘I’, ‘now’ and ‘here’.

¹¹ The resultant relativistic semantics would differ in this respect from previously defended versions of relativistic semantics.

¹² There are two reasons why I hesitate to say that they are proponents of this view. First, Cohen’s and DeRose’s views now deviate in a number of interesting ways from the simple thesis. See e.g., DeRose (2004, forthcoming). Second, in their early essays Cohen, DeRose and Lewis did not say that ‘know’ contributed different knowledge relations to truth-conditions but only that the truth-conditions for sentences used to make knowledge-attributions vary with context. The latter claim is consistent with non-indexical contextualism, as ‘truth-conditions’ may be understood meta-linguistically.

In “Non-Indexical Contextualism” (this issue) MacFarlane launches a new form of contextualism: non-indexical contextualism.¹³ MacFarlane argues that we ought to distinguish between two forms of context-sensitivity. An expression can be context-sensitive in virtue of the fact that its semantic contribution to truth-conditions (i.e., its semantic value or content) varies with context. But it can also be context-sensitive in virtue of the fact that its *extension* varies with context. If the extension of an expression varies with context, then the circumstances of evaluation will include additional parameters. For example, if ‘know’ is context-sensitive in the non-indexical sense, then circumstances of evaluation will be triples of worlds, times and count-as (or epistemic standard) parameters, not simply pairs of worlds and times.

One of the main virtues of non-indexical contextualism compared to indexical contextualism is that it avoids the problem of shared content (Cappelen and Lepore 2005, 2006).¹⁴ In a nutshell, the problem is this. If a given expression has different semantic values in different contexts of use, then it would seem impossible for a person in one context to report what was asserted by another in a distinct context. If, for example, John says ‘I know my car is in the driveway’, Mary can correctly report this as ‘John asserted that he knows his car is in the driveway’, and this is so, even if the standards in place in John’s context are significantly different from those in place in Mary’s. But ‘know’ occurs in Mary’s indirect speech report. So, if ‘know’ makes different semantic contributions in Mary’s and John’s contexts, then we should expect Mary’s report to be incorrect. Non-indexical contextualism does not run into this problem, as it takes ‘know’ to make the same semantic contribution in all contexts.

In “Billboards, Bombs and Shotgun Weddings” Andy Egan takes issue with the standard notion of content. In standard semantics the content of indexicals is determined relative to the context of use, i.e., the context of the speaker. The content of ‘I am here now’, for example, is a propositional structure containing the speaker, the speaker’s location and the time of speech. It is well-known that this idealized conception of content is too narrow to account for all communicative situations. For instance, it cannot straightforwardly be extended to account for answering-machine messages of the form ‘I am not here now’. For given a narrow conception of content, the answering-machine sentence ‘I am not here now’ would, relative to the speaker’s context, express the proposition that the recorder is not at the place of the recording at the time of the recording, and that proposition is just plainly false. Egan argues that the speaker-hearer-gap phenomenon is much more widespread than hitherto assumed. He also considers a related phenomenon, which is that of one and the same utterance being used to express several distinct propositions. To take an example from Egan, a priest who utters ‘Jesus loves you’ to a group of people may not intend to assert that Jesus loves the group to which he is speaking. Instead, his utterance may be expressing many distinct singular propositions, for instance, the proposition that Jesus

¹³ For recent discussions of John MacFarlane’s non-indexical contextualism, see e.g., Cappelen and Lepore (Manuscript), Brogaard (forthcoming b, c), Lopez De Sa (Manuscript a, b), and Weatherson (Manuscript). For related views, see Recanati (forthcoming a, b). For criticism, see Bach (2005).

¹⁴ As Cappelen and Lepore and Jason Stanley have pointed out (Personal Communication), the problem can be formulated without making use of indirect speech reports. According to them, contextualism is threatened by the problem of explaining how speakers in different contexts are able to communicate and understand each other.

loves Kurt. After covering an impressive number of such examples Egan argues that the evidence suggests that the content of an utterance should be understood relative to a speaker *and* a hearer. One and the same utterance can thus express several distinct propositions depending on who the intended hearer or hearers are. Content, on this “shotgun” proposal, is thus speaker- *and* hearer-sensitive and not just speaker-sensitive. Egan concludes with a discussion of whether relativistic semantics, as standardly construed, can offer an equally compelling explanation of the data. His answer is that it cannot.

In “Semantics and Truth Relative to A World” Michael Glanzberg argues against what he calls ‘the easy road to relativism’. Relativistic semantics takes circumstances of evaluation to include a judge parameter. For example, in Laserson’s framework, the proposition that roller coasters are fun is true or false only relative to a circumstance of evaluation that contains the standards of the person evaluating proposition for truth. So, if I find roller coasters fun and you find them boring, then the proposition that roller coasters are fun is true relative to a circumstance that contains me as a judge but false relative to a circumstance that contains you as a judge. The easy road to relativism is roughly this. In standard semantics proposition truth is already relative to a circumstance of evaluation, for instance, a world (and perhaps other parameters). For example, the proposition that roller coasters are dangerous may be false in the actual world but true in a less technologically advanced world. Proposition truth thus appears to be relative to a world in standard semantics. Adding a judge parameter to the circumstance of evaluation might thus be thought to be a rather innocent move—a natural extension of the basic framework of standard semantics. Glanzberg argues against this proposal. Even though there may be independent support for relativism, he says, the easy road argument does not get off the ground. One reason for this, he says, is that the world-relativity found in standard semantics is merely a heuristic tool. One can offer a semantics for natural language without appealing to relativity to worlds (or other parameters). Glanzberg’s paper covers various possible ways of formulating a semantics without direct reference to worlds, one possibility being intensional type theory in which no terms refer to worlds. Even if possible-worlds-based model theory for intensional type theory is available, no world-relativity, Glanzberg says, is ‘really part of the empirical study of semantics of natural language’. The easy road to relativism from standard semantics, Glanzberg concludes, is thus a non-starter.

3.2 The open future, conditionals and taste predicates

In their contribution to this double issue Sebastiano Moruzzi and Crispin Wright bring the old problem of the expressibility of global relativism to bear on MacFarlane’s assessment-sensitive approach to the puzzle of future contingents. The old problem of the expressibility of global relativism is this: if all utterances are true or false only relative to an assessor, what are we to say about utterances such as ‘relativism is correct’. As relativistic semantics is standardly taken to apply only to a limited group of expressions, relativistic semantics does not face a problem of expressibility. However, Moruzzi and Wright argue, on the hypothesis that the future is open, relativistic truth does face a problem of expressibility, not unlike the old problem.

Moruzzi and Wright begin by noting that the relativist's metalinguistic statements such as 'Peter's utterance of "this chili is tasty" is true relative to Jamie's context of assessment but false relative to Liz' context of assessment' is absolutely true or absolutely false. The reason for this is that the metalinguistic statement does not contain any used (as opposed to mentioned) relative predicates. However, suppose now that the future is genuine open. If the future is genuinely open, then the truth-makers available tomorrow differ from the truth-makers available today; so the set of possible histories whose futures are distinct but whose pasts overlap will be different at different times. Tomorrow at t_2 a faculty meeting will be taking place at t_2 in every possible history. Today at t_1 a faculty meeting will be taking place at t_2 in some possible histories and not in others. Accordingly, today's utterance of 'there will be a faculty meeting tomorrow' may be true relative to an assessor assessing the utterance tomorrow, even if the utterance is indeterminate relative to an assessor assessing the utterance today. But consider now the relativist's meta-linguistic utterance at t_2 of 'Your utterance at t_1 of "there will be a faculty meeting at t_2 " is true at t_2 '. Intuitively, this utterance is true. After all, this is just what the relativists about future contingents are claiming. But if the utterance 'your utterance at t_1 of "there will be a faculty meeting at t_2 " is true at t_2 ' is assessed at t_1 , then there are possible histories in which a faculty meeting will not take place. So the meta-linguistic utterance is false at t_1 . And if a meta-linguistic utterance is false at t_1 , then it is false at t_2 . So, if the relativist's meta-linguistic utterances are absolutely true or false, then an utterance of 'your utterance at t_1 of "there will be a faculty meeting at t_2 " is true at t_2 ' ought to be false. This, say Moruzzi and Wright, is a paradox for the relativist. To solve the paradox Moruzzi and Wright propose to introduce different orders of assessments. Different levels of assessments correspond to different levels of absolutism/relativism. With respect to future contingents one can thus be a second-level absolutist but a first-level relativist.

In his contribution to this volume Brian Weatherson defends a new kind of relativistic semantics for open conditionals, that is, indicative conditionals 'whole antecedents are consistent with our picture of the world'. As Weatherson reminds us, there are four kinds of contextualist/relativist approaches one may take with respect to expressions whose extensions seem to vary with epistemic states or standards: Indexical and non-indexical contextualism and indexical and non-indexical contextualism. On an indexical contextualist semantics for a given kind of expression e , the content of e varies with the context of the speaker (and perhaps the hearer—see Egan's contribution to this issue). On a non-indexical contextualist semantics for a given kind of expression e , the extension of e varies with context of the speaker (see MacFarlane's contribution to this issue). If, for example, e is a sentence, then the truth-value of e varies with the context of the speaker. On an indexical relativistic semantics for a given kind of expression e , the content of e varies with the judge, i.e., the person who evaluates the discourse fragment in which e occurs. Finally, on non-indexical relativistic semantics, the extension of e varies with the judge (see e.g., Kölbel's contribution to this issue). While indexical and non-indexical contextualism and non-indexical relativism have been defended by several authors, indexical relativism has received remarkably little attention.

Defending indexical relativism for open conditionals, Weatherson thus fills a gap in the philosophical literature. On Weatherson's account, an open conditional of the

form ‘if p , then q ’ has the logical form $C(p, q, X)$, where C is the a priori entailment relation and ‘ X ’ is a plural variable that takes as its values (roughly) the background propositions kept fixed by the evaluator(s) of the conditional. Weatherson argues that there are several different ways of construing the relation between the evaluators and the values of ‘ X ’. As a rough characterization, one can say that there is some epistemic relation R such that a proposition s is among the X s iff some salient individual i stands in relation R to s . R can now be construed, for instance, as the knowledge relation or the ‘position to know’ relation. So, suppose John utters the conditional ‘if Linda accepts a job in California, then her husband will follow her’. John’s utterance then has the form $C(\text{Linda accepts a job in California, her husband will follow her, } X)$, where X are the propositions that are, say, known, by the evaluators of John’s utterance. So, if the evaluators know that Linda’s husband usually goes where Linda goes, then the utterance will be true. If, on the other hand, the evaluators don’t know that Linda’s husband usually goes where Linda goes, then John’s utterance will fail to be true. Weatherson allows that the plural variable ‘ X ’ can be partially bound by higher operators. Partial binding of plural variables is a relatively well-known phenomenon. For example, in ‘If every guest arrives on time, we might go to a restaurant’, ‘we’ is partially bound by ‘every guest’ and partially deictic (in including the speaker). Weatherson argues that in some cases the plural variable ‘ X ’ is partially bound by an earlier phrase. He concludes by offering reasons for accepting indexical relativism instead of indexical or non-indexical contextualism for open conditionals.

Peter Lasersohn—one of the originators of contemporary relativistic semantics—has in earlier work [“Context Dependence, Disagreement, and Predicates of Personal Taste”] argued that relativistic semantics offers a better explanation of faultless disagreement about what is tasty, fun or boring than contextual semantics. Faultless disagreement cases are cases in which the disputants disagree about which truth-value to assign to a proposition but in which it appears that neither is mistaken. Lasersohn’s semantic framework is slightly different from the (different) relativistic frameworks developed by e.g., Kölbel (2002), MacFarlane (2003, 2005), Egan et al. (2004), Boghossian (2006), and Wright (2006). According to Lasersohn, propositions are true or false only relative to a judge parameter but one can, in different contexts, adopt different stances. When one adopts an autocentric stance, the speaker is the value of the judge parameter. When one adopts an exocentric stance, someone other than the speaker is assigned as a value to the judge parameter. Finally, when one adopt an acentric stance, one will tend to refrain from assigning a truth-value to sentences containing predicates of personal taste.

In his contribution to this double-issue Lasersohn shows that relativistic semantics has other advantages besides being able to explain faultless disagreement. Relativistic semantics also offers a superior explanation of our intuitions about attitude reports (e.g., ‘John believes the roller coaster ride was fun’). Attitude reports, Lasersohn argues, pose a problem for most forms of contextualism. Garden-variety contextualists take predicates of personal taste to contain a hidden indexical variable that gets assigned the speaker’s standards as a value. So, ‘this chili is tasty’ is true relative to a context of use iff this chili is tasty by the speaker’s standards. As it turns out, however, contextualists are required to make exceptions in attitude contexts. ‘John believes that this chili is tasty’ clearly does not express the proposition that John believes that this

chili is tasty by the speaker's standards. Lasersohn argues that 'believe' and other attitude verbs are not two-place predicates but three-place predicates. Belief sentences ascribe relations among a subject, a proposition and a judge. As a result, 'John believes the roller coaster ride was fun' can be interpreted as saying, for example, that John believes the roller coaster ride was fun for Amy, as saying that John believes the roller coaster ride was fun for himself, and so on. Lasersohn's contribution also includes a novel discussion of factive attitude verbs and the problems posed by such for non-relativistic theories of predicates of personal taste.

In "The Evidence for Relativism" Max Kölbel looks closer at how to determine whether or not a piece of evidence counts as evidence for a given semantics. He is particularly interested in the question of what would count as evidence for the thesis that a certain kind of expression is a relative expression, i.e., an expression whose extension depends on the standards of the person who evaluates the sentences in which the expression occurs. Kölbel begins by considering David Lewis' definition of a language [from "Languages and Language"] as 'a function from a domain of sentences into a range of meanings'. When one construes 'language' in this way, there will naturally be indefinitely many languages. But not all of these languages are languages used by actual language users. When we study a given natural language a basic task is therefore that of determining which of many possible languages is the natural language under scrutiny. Or, as Kölbel puts it, a basic semantic task is that of determining what he calls 'the actual language relation'. The actual language relation can be determined in several different ways. One way is to assume that some recognizable subset of actual language users (the ideal language users) utter sentences in their language only if they believe the contents of these sentences and the believed contents are true at the world and time of the belief. Of course, as Kölbel points out, this approach assumes that we can somehow recognize ideal language users.

Focusing on predicates of personal taste (e.g., 'is tasty', 'is fun', etc.) Kölbel then considers the standard evidence presented in favor of a relativistic semantics for taste predicates. Among the evidence considered is disagreement (e.g., about what is tasty), object-language assessment of what is said (e.g., if you say 'this is tasty', I might reply 'that is not true') and object language speech reports (e.g., if John says 'this is tasty', I might report this as 'John said that this is tasty'). After a critical discussion of what it would take to determine whether the evidence in question supports a relativistic semantics for predicates of personal taste Kölbel takes a closer look at certain competitors to relativism. He concludes that in order for the standard evidence to support relativism, several additional, untested and therefore still questionable, assumptions about actual language must be made. If, for example, predicates of personal taste are context-sensitive and the language contains context-shifting operators, the evidence from object-language assessment of what is said is easily explained.

3.3 Epistemic and moral relativism

In "Defusing Epistemic Relativism" Duncan Pritchard offers a refreshing new perspective on the problem of faultless disagreement. The problem of faultless disagreement is, as mentioned, that of explaining the intuition that disputants in a debate are

blameless in spite of the fact that they assign different truth-values to one and the same proposition. Semantic relativists argue that truth relativism offers the best account of these intuitions. Pritchard's paper examines the thesis that the faultlessness of faultless disagreements is purely epistemic. This is the position he calls 'epistemic relativism'. The idea underlying epistemic relativism, so construed, is that while a subject's belief is either objectively true or false, its epistemic standing will depend on the subject's epistemic framework (or set of epistemic principles endorsed by the subject). For example, if A says 'Moses parted the Red Sea' and B replies 'No he didn't', then, according to the epistemic relativist, one of the two is mistaken but the beliefs underlying their assertions may have the same epistemic standing, for example, because A's framework includes principles to the effect that scriptures are good sources of information while B's framework does not.

Pritchard argues that strong forms of epistemic relativism run into trouble with respect to framework-external factors. The main trouble is that any form of epistemic relativism (not being a form of truth-relativism) recognizes that justificatory principles are framework-external (e.g., truth). But, Pritchard argues, strong epistemic relativism cannot accommodate these principles in a principled fashion. A related problem, we might add, is that of accounting for second-order assessment claims. For example, while 'Moses parted the Red Sea' is either objectively true or false, 'A is justified in believing Moses parted the Red Sea' is, given strong epistemic relativism, true or false only relative to A's epistemic framework. Accordingly, strong epistemic relativism would seem to collapse into a form of truth relativism at some level. Pritchard argues that what he calls 'dialectical epistemic relativism' circumvents the difficulties facing its stronger cousin. Dialectical epistemic relativism holds that while opposing beliefs may have the same epistemic standing, external factors often make a difference to the beliefs' justificatory status. Pritchard concludes with an argument to the effect that dialectical epistemic relativism is a relatively harmless position which, initial appearances to the contrary, does not entail a form of dogmatism.

Moral relativism is the focus of Michael P. Lynch, David Capps and Daniel Massey's contribution to this double issue. Lynch, Capps and Massey (LCM) begin with [Wright \(2003\)](#) suggestion that the truth-predicate for moral claims should be understood in terms of superassertibility. As LCM point out, Wright characterizes superassertibility with respect to moral discourse as follows: 'The morally true is that which can be morally justified and which then retains that justification no matter how refined or extensive an additional consideration is given to the matter'. As propositions can be superassertible relative to one evaluator but not relative to another, this proposal naturally leads to a form of relativism.

But, LCM argue, the proposal is not entirely happy. If one took all occurrences of the truth-predicate to be co-extensive with 'super-assertibility', it would yield a form of anti-realism about truth. One can remain a realist about truth in non-moral cases if one maintains that occurrences of the truth-predicate in non-moral discourse are not co-extensive with 'superassertibility'. A problem arises, however. If the truth predicate means different things depending on which proposition it attaches to, many apparently valid arguments come out invalid, for instance, 'it's true that eating horsemeat is morally wrong. It's true that John ate horsemeat yesterday. So, it's true that John did something morally wrong yesterday'. The argument seems valid but this

is not the result we would get if the different occurrences of ‘true’ meant different things. The thesis that some but not all occurrences of ‘is true’ mean the same as ‘is superassertible’ is thus subject to Frege-Geach problems.

LCM argue that to avoid such problems the moral relativist should treat super-assertibility as a property that makes moral claims true and not as a property ascribed by some occurrences of the truth-predicate. After an insightful tour through the debates about moral justification, LCM maintain that the least controversial view of moral justification is the view that moral judgments are justified by how well they cohere with the rest of the moral system to which they belong. As the question of whether a moral system is coherent depends on how many coherence constraints it satisfies and how well it satisfies them, LCM argue, different systems can be coherent to different degrees. Most moral systems are not maximally coherent. But, LCM argue, ‘a moral judgment is true if and only if it *would* be a member of a maximally coherent system of moral and nonmoral judgments’. And this way of characterizing the property that makes a moral judgment true naturally leads to a form of relativism. For a moral judgment and its negation might both be members of distinct maximally coherent moral systems. The truthmaker truth-conditions for moral judgments thus depend on which maximally coherent moral system is under consideration. The form of relativism that ensues, the authors argue, is relatively modest, as it allows for the possibility that moral judgments can be mistaken. LCM conclude with replies to objections to their relativistic framework, one objection being that, since the truth-maker truth-conditions for moral judgments embody a subjunctive conditional, their account is subject to the conditional fallacy. In their reply the authors introduce the notion of super-coherence, which they liken to Wright’s notion of superassertibility.

In “Moral Relativism and Evolutionary Psychology” Steven Hales offers interesting new support for a kind of relativism with respect to ethical theories. Hales divides ethical theories into agent-centered and agent-neutral theories. According to agent-centered theories, at least some moral prescriptions are essentially indexical. For example, it may be a duty for me to rescue my child rather than your child if both are in danger and I can’t rescue both but a duty for you to rescue your child rather than my child if both are in danger, and you cannot do both. According to agent-neutral theories, everyone has the same duties, for example, the duty to help others in need regardless of how you are related to them.

According to Hales, agent-centered and agent-neutral ethical theories produce mutually inconsistent moral instruction, and the inconsistency is unlikely to have a resolution. This is because agent-centered and agent-neutral theories are supported by different kinds of moral intuition produced by different aspects of natural selection. Agent-centered theories are supported by agent-centered intuitions hardwired in kin selection, and agent-neutral theories are supported by agent-neutral intuitions produced by game-theoretic reciprocity. Because the intuitions that support agent-centered and agent-neutral theories are justified by different intuitions which are produced by different aspects of natural selection and so ‘diverge at base’, it is unlikely that we will ever be able to resolve the dispute between agent-centered and agent-neutral theories. But rather than treating this as a reason to become moral skeptics, Hales argues that we should take it to be a reason for treating ethical theories as true or false only relative to a perspective. Agent-centered theories are true relative to the perspective

of the agent-centered intuitions produced by kin-selection, and agent-neutral theories are true relative to the perspective of the agent-neutral intuitions produced by reciprocity.¹⁵

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