

6 Meaning and Context: A Survey of a Contemporary Debate*

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In this chapter I want to survey a contemporary debate about the place of context in determining meaning. The debate has turned on examples like the following: imagine a fridge which contains only a small puddle of milk on its floor. Two conversations concerning the fridge then take place:

Scenario 1:

Hugo is dejectedly stirring a cup of black coffee. Noticing this Odile says 'There is milk in the fridge'.

Scenario 2:

Hugo has been cleaning the fridge. Odile opens the fridge door and says 'There is milk in the fridge'.

The intuition which drives the current debate is that what Odile says can differ in truth value between these two scenarios. As Travis (from whom the example is taken) notes (1989: 18–19):

Although there is no ambiguity in the English words 'There is milk in the refrigerator', or none relevant to the differences between the two speakings, Odile's words in the first case said what was false, while in the second case they said what was true. Both spoke of the same state of the world, or the same refrigerator in the same condition. So, in the first case, the words said what is false of a refrigerator with but a milk puddle; in the second case they said what is true of such a refrigerator.

Travis takes examples like these as the stepping off point for a radically context-sensitive account of meaning, which he attributes to the later Wittgenstein (e.g. see PI §§117, 514; Travis 1989: Chapters 1 and 6). However, this kind of example has also helped to motivate a range of other positions in the contemporary literature. Thus, in §1, I will sketch five distinct ways to account for the phenomenon thrown up by examples like the one above and suggest that we can view the positions in the debate on a scale, ranging from standard formal semantics at one end through to Wittgensteinian positions

which embody the claim that meaning is use at the other. However, my aim in this chapter is to suggest that, viewed in this way, it becomes less than clear that the intermediate positions, between the two ends of the spectrum, are truly viable. The general problem is that all seem prey to an internal tension, at once recommending that we take the phenomenon thrown up by these examples seriously and yet recommending that we don't take it so seriously as to lead us to adopting a use-based approach to meaning. Yet, as I'll argue in §11, it's not obvious that this is tenable: once we open the door to examples like the above, taking them to be of genuine semantic significance, we may well find that there is no principled reason to shut it again until we have reached the Wittgensteinian end of the spectrum.

6.1 The positions in logical space

Cappelen and Lepore (2005) label the kind of thought experiment given above an example of a 'context-shifting argument' (or CSA). CSAs seek to demonstrate a change in semantic content or in methods of assessment via a change in a subject's intuitive assessments of truth and falsity for utterances of type-identical sentences (where no obviously indexical expression in the sentence is responsible for such a change). Although questions can be raised about some putative examples of CSAs, it seems indisputable that in many cases they highlight a genuine phenomenon which stands in need of explanation. The question then is obviously how one chooses to accommodate the phenomenon and in recent literature a range of different proposals have emerged. In broad outline, it seems that there are three possible directions to go in search of an explanation here: first, one may seek to keep one's syntax and semantics as standardly conceived of in formal semantics and look to pragmatics to take on the explanatory burden (the position of minimalism); second, one may keep semantics and pragmatics as standardly conceived and look to syntax to carry the burden (indexicalism); third, one may seek a purely semantic level explanation of these cases (contextualism, added parameters, and occasionalism). I want now to look briefly at how each of these solutions is supposed to work.

6.1.1 Minimal semantics

Minimal semantics is the inheritor of the formal approach to semantics found, for instance, in the work of the early Wittgenstein, Frege, Russell, Carnap and Davidson. Thus a central claim of the approach is that the route to semantic content goes exclusively via syntax (that is to say, every element found at the semantic level must be traceable to something at the syntactic level). In minimalism, this central claim is joined by two further claims: first, that semantic content is *complete*, that is to say, it is content at the level of a proposition or truth-condition.¹ Second, the only context-sensitive elements to be found in the syntax of our language are the intuitively obvious ones

(words like 'this' and 'that', not 'man' and 'red').² Since minimalists do allow that there are some genuinely context-sensitive expressions in natural language they do not hold that semantic content is entirely context-invariant, but they reject the idea that CSAs show us that contextual contributions to semantic content run deeper than the intuitively obvious context-sensitive expressions. Instead, minimalists are minded to give a wholly pragmatic explanation of CSAs. So, when we hear 'There is milk in the fridge' as true relative to one context and false relative to another, with no change in the state of the fridge, what we are sensitive to is held to be the pragmatic speaker meaning the agent communicates, not the semantic content which gives the literal meaning of the sentence itself.

The parallel here is to Grice's explanation of implicature – just as someone may utter a sentence which literally means that *it is a lovely day* and thereby convey some quite different proposition (say that *it is a horrible day* if the speaker is being ironic), so a speaker can utter a sentence with a very general literal meaning, say just that *there is milk in the fridge*, and thereby pragmatically convey a different proposition, say that *there is milk suitable for coffee in the fridge*. To explain CSAs then the minimalist imposes a firm distinction between semantic content (attaching to sentences relativised to contexts of utterance) on one side and pragmatic speaker meaning (attaching to utterances) on the other. The rich contributions of context to content which we see in CSAs fall squarely, the minimalist claims, on the side of speaker meaning. However, the strategy of passing the whole explanatory burden (as far as CSAs are concerned) over to pragmatics simply in order to preserve the above ideas has not met with universal approval. For instance, it has seemed puzzling to many why one would want a semantic theory which posited content so far removed from ordinary speakers' intuitions about the content of their utterances. That is to say, why would we want a semantic theory which specified the literal meaning of the sentence 'Jill has had enough' as simply *Jill has had enough* (or possibly $(\exists x) \text{enough} \langle \text{jill}, x \rangle$, see Borg 2004: 242) when agents' intuitions about what is said by an utterance of this sentence always deliver a richer content such as *Jill has had enough to drink or Jill has had enough of life in the fire service?* This and other worries with minimalism has motivated many to look elsewhere for a solution to CSAs.

6.1.2 Indexicalism

Indexicalism shares two foundational assumptions with minimalism – it assumes that semantic content is propositional and that it is wholly syntactically determined. Thus contextual contributions to semantic content must be limited to those licensed by syntactic elements. However, unlike minimalism, indexicalism seeks to offer a semantic level account of the changes in truth value in CSAs, thus it aims to offer a semantics which fits our intuitive judgements of content in a way which minimalism does not. These two apparently opposing desiderata are met by expanding the

amount of syntactically licensed context-sensitivity in our language. For an indexicalist, if our intuitions suggest that the content of a sentence shifts, in various respects, across shifts in context of utterance, then this is compelling evidence for the existence of syntactic (or perhaps lexical, see below) context-sensitivity in that sentence. Exactly what form this additional syntactic context-sensitivity takes is then a fairly open matter. For instance Stanley (2002; 2005a) argues that associated with each nominal are two hidden, context-sensitive variables which are jointly responsible for the kinds of shifts in truth-value we witness in CSAs. In contrast to this kind of hidden indexical view, Rothschild and Segal (2009) treat predicate expressions themselves as context-sensitive. On this kind of 'predicate indexicalism' there is no need to posit hidden indexicals, instead axioms are provided directly for predicates which treat them as context-sensitive terms on a par with standard indexicals.³

Finally, it seems that we might opt not to posit hidden indexicals nor to redefine expressions as indexicals, but rather to treat the properties terms express as the source of the additional context-sensitivity witnessed in (at least some) CSAs. So for instance, Hawthorne (2004) and Stanley (2005b) treat epistemic vocabulary as picking out subject-sensitive properties. For instance, whether or not someone knows that *p* is held to be due in part to their own practical situation: I might know that *p* in a low stakes context but fail to know *p* in a high stakes one. Treating predicates as expressing context-sensitive properties increases the amount of context-sensitivity in our language and it does so, broadly speaking, via the syntax of the language (e.g. it is because a sentence contains the word 'know' that a sentence like 'Alfie knows that he has hands' can change in truth-value across changes in context of utterance). However note that (unlike other versions of indexicalism) this kind of property indexicalism need not be particularly syntactically revisionary. A Stanley- and Hawthorne-style account need at most amend the lexical entry for relevant expressions to reveal the context-sensitive nature of the properties picked out and indeed it need not even posit this degree of change (e.g. a disquotational axiom like ['know' means *know*] could appear unchanged in a property indexical theory).

Although they differ in details, all three of these positions seem to deserve classification as forms of indexicalism because all preserve the basic idea that context contributes to content only via something in the syntax while maintaining that the phenomenon thrown up by CSAs must be explained at the semantic level. Thus indexicalists are driven to find syntactic or lexical context-sensitivity where we might not immediately expect it.

6.1.3 Contextualism

While indexicalism rejects one of minimalism's basic claims – that the only indexicals in natural language are the obvious ones – contextualism (also) rejects another – that the route to semantic content runs exclusively via

syntactic content. According to contextualism, the standard mechanism for handling context-sensitivity (drawn from the framework developed by Kaplan and Perry and exploited to differing extents in minimalism and indexicalism) is radically inadequate. Instead, to properly account for the depth and range of context-sensitivity in the propositions we literally express on occasions of utterance, we must allow pragmatic features a much freer reign within the semantic realm (see Carston 2002; Recanati 2004). The proposal of contextualism is thus that pragmatic properties get to act *twice*: once in the usual Gricean, post-semantic way to deliver implicatures, but also once in a non-standard, inherently semantic way to deliver the proposition expressed or truth-conditional content for a sentence as uttered in a given context.⁴ So where we have an intuitive change in content across changes in context, as in a CSA, the claim is that this can reflect a change in semantic content, even if there is no context-sensitive syntactic element to explain this change. For context can contribute to semantic content *simply* because that is what is demanded by the context. So, when Odile utters 'There is milk in the fridge' in the first kind of scenario above what she literally asserts is that *there is milk in the fridge in a form suitable for coffee* – the context acts to enrich the proposition literally expressed even though this is not required by anything in the syntax of the sentence. Thus the datum provided by CSAs is given semantic level explanation not by broadening the occasions on which appeal to the standard mechanisms of indexicality is made (as in indexicalism) but by altering our view of the way in which contextually determined content can enter into the semantic arena.

6.1.4 Added parameters

Our fourth move agrees in many ways with the earlier position of indexicalism, for it adopts a broadly Kaplan-Perry-style picture whereby sentences are true or false relative to a number of contextually determined parameters. Where it differs from indexicalism and contextualism (and why it is a more radical position than either of these two) is in the role played by contextually determined material. Specifically, while our previous accounts have treated contextually determined content as contributing to the proposition expressed by a sentence as uttered in a given context (with the disagreements being, first, how often this happens – the debate between minimalism and indexicalism – and, second, how it happens – the debate between minimalism/indexicalism and contextualism), the added parameters account treats contextual material (in at least some cases) as contributing to the parameters against which a proposition is assessed for truth or falsity. To see how this proposal works consider the debate between eternalism and temporalism about propositions (MacFarlane (2009) also uses this example to introduce the view): according to advocates of eternalism propositions incorporate relevant times into their content. So if I say 'Fido is hungry' at *t*₁, then the proposition I express can be thought of as consisting of three

elements: <Fido, hunger, *t*₁>.⁵ Asserting the same type sentence at a different time, *t*₂, results in a different proposition being expressed, one consisting of <Fido, hunger, *t*₂>. Advocates of temporalism, on the other hand, argue that propositional contents are themselves timeless: our two utterances of 'Fido is hungry' express one and the same proposition, simply consisting of the ordered pair <Fido, hunger>, what differs is the time against which the proposition should be evaluated for truth. In the first case, we get the value True if Fido is hungry at *t*₁, and in the second if he is hungry at *t*₂. Both eternalism and temporalism then yield the same results, but in temporalism time features not as a part of the propositional content but as a parameter against which a propositional content is assessed. Following this model, then, and faced with CSAs, the advocate of position (iv) suggests increasing in some way the parameters usually accepted as relevant to determining truth for a proposition (e.g. world and perhaps time).

One way to account for CSAs on this approach would be to allow a massive increase in the number of relevant parameters. For instance, there could be a contextually determined parameter of richness against which the unique propositional content expressed by the sentence 'Jill is rich' could be assessed for truth or falsity. Thus one and the same proposition, that *Jill is rich*, might be true with respect to one contextually determined parameter (say, rich-for-average-UK-citizens) but false relative to a different one (say, rich-for-UK-royalty). On this sort of approach we might end up with every (or perhaps almost every) term requiring a distinct parameter against which an utterance of it in a sentence could be assessed: an utterance of 'That is a table' might be sensitive to different parametric values for *tablehood*, 'She is my wife' might be sensitive to different contextually determined standards for counting as a wife, and 'milk in the fridge' could be true or false relative to different parametric values for counting as containing milk.⁶

Alternatively, one might seek to add just one or two more abstract parameters which could serve to cover all the more specific instances required. So for instance MacFarlane argues for a position he terms 'non-indexical contextualism' which introduces just one additional parameter: 'counts as' (cf. Predelli 2005). As he writes (2009):

The 'counts-as' parameter is so called because it fixes what things have to be like in order to *count as* having the property of tallness (or any other property at a circumstance of evaluation).

So, we have one proposition, say *that Jill is rich*, but this is true/false depending on whether Jill counts as rich in the relevant context. Finally, a third version of the added parameters approach would be to allow that the truth of a proposition is relative to an individual. In this way, we would not expect public, objective parameters (like a contextually salient standard of richness) but would allow the additional parameter required for assessment to be a

person. Thus the proposition that *Star Wars is good* might be true relative to me and my standards of taste but false relative to you and yours. Notice that the claim is not (the fairly innocuous one) that I'm asserting the proposition that *Star Wars is good according to me*, while you are asserting the different proposition that *Star Wars is good according to you*. This approach would be tantamount to indexicalism or contextualism. Rather the claim is that, just as the proposition that *Fido is hungry* may be true relative to t1 and false relative to t2, so the proposition that *Star Wars is good* can be true relative to me and false relative to you. This version of the added parameters view, then, is a form of relativism.⁷ However, regardless of the number of parameters proposed, or their precise nature, the key idea remains the same: a single proposition is assessed for truth on each occasion, with what changes being something in the contextually determined parameters against which that proposition is assessed for truth. It is because context matters for assessments of truth though it doesn't contribute to propositional content that the added parameters proposal counts as increasing the amount of context-sensitivity in our theory but *not* as increasing indexicality.

6.1.5 Occasionalism

The final approach to be outlined in response to the phenomenon thrown up by CSAs follows approaches (iii) and (iv) in counselling a purely semantic level explanation. However it differs from these accounts in how far it is willing to move from the model of meaning deployed in previous accounts.⁸ For whereas all our previous approaches preserved aspects of the standard formal model for explaining context-sensitivity, occasionalism embraces a very different way of thinking about meaning and its relation to context. According to occasionalism there is simply no such thing as determinate content outside a context, for it is only in use that words and concepts come to have particular conditions of application.⁹ This view of meaning is one which Travis traces back to the later-Wittgenstein:

The point of the discussion of language games, with which [PT] begins, is that naming, or referring [...] underdetermines conditions for correctness of wholes, notably, where relevant, conditions for their truth. Wholes with given referents, embedded in different language games, would be true under any of many very different sets of conditions [...] True and false are in the first instance evaluations of particular historical events – speakings of words on particular occasions, in particular circumstances – and of the fittingness of the words for those circumstances. (2008: 254)

While this may sound at first blush like contextualism, the position is in fact more radical than many under the contextualist banner would wish to endorse. For Travis takes underdetermination to be a feature of representation

in general, hence it holds for language and for thought. There can thus be no idea of 'filling out' a linguistically expressed content to get to the complete content the speaker had in mind, for this kind of context-independent content is non-existent. One reason for thinking this is that, just as the overt elements of the utterance are open to different contextual understandings, so any attempt to fill out or expand what is expressed will itself be open to different contextual understandings. So, if we have an utterance of 'The apple is red', which a contextualist might claim expresses a contextually enriched proposition like *the apple is red on its skin*, Travis's concern is that the contextual expansion *on its skin* is no less in need of contextual interpretation than the original elements were. As he writes: 'only in appropriate circumstances do words make sense; only in a suitable home or in suitable surroundings do they express a thought with content definite enough to permit, *inter alia*, evaluation in truth-involving terms' (1989: 36).

These five positions give us, then, the extant responses to the issues thrown up by CSAs. Now of course there is much more we could do to spell out each of these positions, including looking in proper detail at the arguments each can muster in its own defence. However, instead of doing this, I want to ask a more general question concerning the stability of the positions between formal semantics and use-based theories. The worry is that, having bought in to the intuitions which motivate use-based theories sufficiently to abandon standard formal semantics, the accounts on offer can give us no principled reason to stop short of a full-blown use-theoretic approach. If this is right then it may turn out that, despite the initial impression of a range of possible positions here, it is really the old warhorses of formal semantics and use-based theories of meaning which remain standing.

6.2 Reassessing the middle ground

As I framed the debate in the last section, minimalism and occasionalism lie at opposite ends of the spectrum on accounts of linguistic meaning: minimalism holds that there is a meaning for sentences (relativised to contexts of utterance to accommodate genuine syntactically marked context-sensitivity) and this meaning is truth-evaluable or propositional. This minimal semantic content is (for sentences not containing genuine indexicals) insensitive to the use to which a word or sentence is being put. Occasionalism, on the other hand, holds that meaning emerges only within a context of use, there is necessarily no such thing as 'that which a sentence says to be so' (Travis 2008: 151). The positions which lie between minimalism and occasionalism can then be seen as progressive movements away from the view of formal semantics that it is sentences (relativised to contexts of utterance) which possess semantic content and towards the Wittgensteinian view that meaning is properly a property of utterances (i.e. of language in use). So indexicalism takes a small step along this road by preserving the idea that semantic content is wholly

syntactically determined but relaxing the range of expressions which are treated as genuine indexicals in natural language. Contextualism takes a rather bigger step and allows pragmatically determined features to contribute to the proposition expressed by a sentence as uttered in a given context *whenever* they are required (whether this requirement comes from syntactic elements or purely contextual needs). The added parameters move then takes a bigger step again by locating the context sensitivity in question not within the content of a proposition at all, but as part of the contextually determined framework within which questions of truth and falsity can be asked (perhaps going so far as to allow that this framework can differ across individuals, if a relativist position is adopted). Thus it seems as if we have a range of options for handling the way in which context contributes to content (at least so far as CSAs are concerned) between hard-nosed formalism on one side and full-blooded use theoretic approaches to meaning on the other. Furthermore, given that in philosophy, as in life, compromise is often the best policy it may well seem that one of these intermediate positions gives us the most plausible solution to the phenomenon revealed by CSAs. However I want to suggest that this appearance may be illusory for, regardless of the specific arguments which have been given for and against different intermediary positions, there is reason to think that the entire middle ground in this debate is unstable.

Turning first to indexicalism, advocates of both minimalism and occasionalism agree that the phenomenon revealed by CSAs is simply not well handled by seeking to increase the amount of indexical terms in our language. Thus Travis writes (2008: 115):

There are several respects in which the present phenomena are *unlike* central cases where the parameter approach seems promising. One difference is this. In central cases, such as 'I' and 'now', pointing to given parameters seems to be a part of the terms meaning what they do. It is a part of the meaning of 'I', and its use in English, that it is a device for a speaker to speak of himself. That suggests speakers as a relevant parameter [...] By contrast, it is not part of what 'green' means, so far as we can tell, that speakings of it speak of, or refer to, such-and-such parameters. If its contribution, on a speaking, to what is said is a function of some parameters – say, implausibly, the speaker's intentions – saying so is not part of what 'green' means. The parameter approach does not *automatically* suggest itself here as it did with 'I'.

Cappelen and Lepore in defence of minimalism (2005) reinforce this intuitive rejection of the indexicality approach by setting out tests for genuinely indexical expressions which they argue standardly context-sensitive terms (words like 'this' and 'I') pass while terms not standardly treated as context-sensitive (words like 'man' and 'red') fail. Thus they argue there are strong reasons to resist the claim that these latter words are really disguised indexicals.

However there also seems to be a somewhat more abstract concern with indexicalism, for it seems to need both to take CSAs seriously and yet to fail to take them quite seriously enough. On the first point, indexicalism counsels taking CSAs seriously for it is these kinds of examples which push us away from the intuitive picture of a fairly limited class of indexicals in natural language and towards a much more pervasive model of the context-dependence of our language. Thus it is CSAs which push us to a picture where syntax is largely hidden from view and context-sensitivity is endemic in language. However having taken them seriously in this way, indexicalism then suggests that the appeal to context which CSAs throw up can be entirely handled by syntactic means, but I think we need to ask what could motivate this claim.

First, I think we need to ask why the indexicalist wants to hold on to the idea (from formal semantics) that syntax determines semantics. For this principle has some bite while syntax is taken to be relatively objectively specifiable, so that it can provide a clear constraint on what can count as semantic content and in turn can play the role of an epistemic guide to that content.¹⁰ Yet on the indexicalist picture this independence of syntax is undermined, for on this model syntactic claims are in part determined by semantic intuitions: we posit hidden indexicals or move nouns to the class of indexicals, and so on, because we want to capture the intuitions about meaning thrown up in CSAs.¹¹ But if syntactic content is, in this respect, dictated by semantic intuitions then there doesn't seem to be any point to hanging on to the idea that syntax determines semantics: syntax doesn't serve to constrain what we can find at the semantic level (since, crudely speaking, we are allowed to fiddle with our syntax to get it to deliver what we want in our semantics) nor can it provide an independent epistemic route to semantics since the relevant syntax is covert and can be established (if at all) only by using fairly *recherché* tests.

Of course, it must be noted that Stanley has gone to some lengths to offer independent motivation for the variables he posits, primarily in the form of his 'binding argument' (see, e.g., Stanley 2000) but even he is clear that this argument plays a post-facto role. It is supposed to provide support for the existence of the hidden variables which semantic intuition (in the form of responses to CSAs) tells us must be there. So it is intuitions about meaning which lead to claims about syntax and this (independent of concerns about the worth of the binding argument, see, e.g., Cappelen and Lepore 2005) seems to undermine the idea that syntax is independent of semantics (in the kind of way which would make trying to hang on to the idea that syntax determines semantics worthwhile).

Secondly, as has been stressed by Neale, it is not clear what the added syntactic complexity adds to the explanatory story here – once we allow that it is pragmatics which is in the driving seat for delivering content for sentences like 'the apple is red', what does it add to require that these

pragmatic processes be chained to syntactic constituents? As Neale writes (2007: 82):

However we proceed, the heavy lifting is done by pragmatic inference because interpreting utterances of sentences containing aphonic 'indexicals' is a pragmatic, richly inferential matter, the product of integrating linguistic and non-linguistic information. The only substantive difference between the way the [contextualist] sees the process of identifying the proposition expressed and the way someone postulating aphonic elements in syntax sees it is that the latter is just *insisting* that the search for and integration of contextual information in the interpretation process is triggered syntactically.¹²

Yet as Neale notes (and as noted above) there is no argument to show that contextual contributions *must* be triggered syntactically.

So, the thought is, viewed from a relatively abstract vantage point where we see how indexicalism relates to minimalism on one side and contextualism on the other, it looks as if the ground it seeks to occupy is slippery. If we take CSAs seriously enough to shift us from minimalism then it becomes obscure why we should hang on to the idea that syntax determines semantics, but without this idea indexicalism comes to look like a purely stipulative stopping-off point en route to contextualism. The moral I think is that, if we are prepared to take CSAs seriously then there is little reason to think that we will find our feet again until we hit contextualism.

Yet just as they disapprove of moves to enrich the syntax to accommodate CSAs, so advocates of minimalism and occasionalism also agree that contextualism is not the way to go. The problem is the one already noted in the introduction of occasionalism: for any putative sharpening, *s*, of a proposition, *p*, that sharpening will itself be open to divergent interpretations. Thus *s* itself will stand in need of a contextual sharpening, but this appears to launch us into a vicious regress. Considering his example of Odile's utterance of 'There is milk in the fridge', Travis writes (1989: 23):

In deciding that Odile spoke truly of the refrigerator, we solved one problem, or a few, about how to sort things into those containing milk and those not. But in principle there may always be more. In fact, we can easily think of countless more [...] On the evidence [a contextually determined understanding] Q will not be a [speaker/S]-insensitive property either. Nor will we make further progress towards expunging S-use sensitivity by repeating the move and speaking of some property attributed on occasion in speaking of Q.¹³

The worry is that according to the contextualist there is determinate, context-insensitive content to be had, their objection is just that the

content provided via the syntax of the sentence alone isn't it. Yet minimalists and occasionalists agree that, if you are swayed by the phenomenon thrown up by CSAs at all, then this is a reason to think that no (or perhaps almost no) content offered in a context-independent manner will ever reach the standard of a complete proposition. For it will always be possible to offer divergent interpretations of the material introduced with the aim of cashing out the context-sensitivity of the proposition. Minimalists take this as a reason to resist the sway of CSAs, occasionalists take it as a reason to reject the standard view of content, but both positions agree that accepting CSAs at face value *and* thinking that context-sensitivity can subsequently be excised by enriching propositional content is inherently unstable.

Finally then what of the view that we should add parameters to account for CSAs? Well, again the concern is one of stability. First, we need to ask how the account is truly differentiated from indexicalism and contextualism. For instance, considering the first version of the added parameters view (which introduced a plethora of distinct parameters), we need to ask, for any sentence, 'why are just these parameters relevant to an assessment of its truth?' and the answer to this question must surely look (at least in part) to the syntactic constituents of the sentence (roughly, we need a parameter of redness when a sentence contains the word 'red'). So, where we previously had a general form for a circumstance of evaluation, against which all sentences were to be assessed, we now have a picture whereby the form of a circumstance of evaluation will differ from sentence to sentence depending on their syntactic and lexical structure. Yet this idea – that it is the words of our language which are responsible for calling contextual features in to play, via their introduction of a contextual parameter – might make us think that, at heart, we are treating these terms as indexicals, but merely stipulating that (unlike classic indexicals) in these cases the context-sensitive dimension of the expression falls outside propositional content. This is not to say, of course, that this variety of the added parameters view is impossible but to note that, since it places the burden for triggering added parameters at the lexical/syntactic level, it seems to demand a motivation which reveals it as genuinely superior to mere indexicalism.

One way we might seek to motivate the added parameters view in opposition to indexicalism or contextualism is via appeal to the evidence surrounding indirect speech reports. So MacFarlane (2009) notes (following Cappelen and Lepore 2005) that we tend to report claims of knowledge homophonically, even when epistemic standards have shifted. So, if Jack asserts 'I know that *p*', it seems one can later report this with 'Jack said that he knew that *p*' even if there has been a shift between utterance and report from a low stakes to a high stakes context. Yet if the indexicalist/contextualist view is right, using 'know' across these kinds of shifts in context will result in different propositions being expressed (since context affects propositional content on these views) and this leaves our practice

of homophonic reporting unexplained. Furthermore, accounts which posit a change in propositional content would seem to entail that the following kind of dialogue should be acceptable, when in fact it seems odd (MacFarlane 2009):

Jack (in low stakes context): I know my car is parked out back. Jill (in high stakes context): Jack said he knew his car was parked out back. Jane (in conversation with Jill): No he didn't!

However, as MacFarlane himself also points out (2007: §4.1), other features of our cross-context linguistic practices seem to be less well captured by the added parameters view. For instance, asked if she knows she has hands, Jill might say she does, but then when exposed to sceptical arguments she might ultimately claim 'I guess I was wrong. I didn't really know I had hands', or the sceptic and the non-sceptic might debate the issue, with one claiming to know that *p* while the other rejects this, asserting that the non-sceptic doesn't know that *p* (see DeRose 2004: 3). Now one might think that the added parameters view in general can explain these differences by maintaining that it is one and the same proposition which is asserted in a high or a low stakes context, with what changes being the parameter against which one counts as knowing. Yet if this is the claim then there is little more real disagreement in these cases than on the indexicalist/contextualist picture. For while, on the added parameters view, it is one and the same proposition in play in all cases, since our protagonists accept different parametric values for knowing there is no room for genuine disagreement or explanation of retractions. When Jill says 'I guess I was wrong, I didn't know that I had hands' what she is really saying is that, relative to the standards of knowledge in a high stakes context, it is false to say that she knows that she has hands, but that doesn't in any way impugn a claim to knowledge in a low stakes context (thus her claim that 'I was wrong' is unexplained). To capture all the facts about indirect discourse, retraction and disagreement, then, MacFarlane argues that we need to adopt assessor-relativism (so that propositions are true/false relative to a person judging them) but also to maintain that there are some contexts where if A accepts *p* and B rejects *p*, then it cannot be that both A and B are accurate in their judgements.¹⁴ Whether this position is defensible or not, the point to notice here is that, once we start exploring what could motivate the added parameters view as against indexicalism/contextualism, it seems that the motivation speaks in favour of the most radical version of the view (i.e. the idea of assessor-relativity); yet we might also ask, with Wright (2007a), whether such evidence about our linguistic practices can really be strong enough to motivate a radical theory like assessor-relativism.

So, motivating the position as against indexicalism/contextualism may prove more problematic than initially supposed. On the other hand,

however, it is also not clear what the added parameter view buys us over a straightforward use-based approach to meaning.¹⁵ For the approach seems to hang on to the shadow of a formal approach even while acknowledging that only within a context can terms be given an understanding or method of application which makes them capable of saying the world to be thus and so. Yet once again the worry is that taking CSAs seriously, in the way that the added parameters account counsils, ultimately undermines the need for the formal structures in which the proposal then dresses the contribution of context to meaning. What, we might wonder, is the real force of claiming that the sentence 'the apple is red' expresses a determinate proposition, though one which is not truth-evaluable without first specifying a context of use which details the way in which the apple must be to count as red, instead of saying, with Wittgenstein and others, that there is no proposition outside a context of use?¹⁶ The point is once again that taking CSAs seriously means putting pragmatic processes firmly in the driving seat, but once they are there then the attempt (by both indexicalism and added parameters approaches) to wrestle the contribution of context to content back into the shape familiar from the Kaplan-Perry treatment of indexicality looks ad hoc. Rather if one is genuinely swayed by CSAs then it seems they provide a reason to move right away from the formal framework that sees them as anomalies or problems to be dealt with and towards a view which sees them as illustrative of the very way in which meaning works.

So where minimalism and occasionalism agree is that the ground between the two opposing accounts appears to be unstable. The most conservative move away from minimalism in the face of CSAs is to increase the amount of indexicality claimed in our language, but if one is swayed by CSAs at all then it seems one should recognise that they reveal a phenomenon very unlike that of standard indexicality. Furthermore, it seems that there is a threat of circularity here: maintaining (for reasons which are now unclear) that syntax determines semantics, yet also allowing that the intuitions about meaning thrown up by CSAs play a constitutive role in determining syntactic analyses. A somewhat less conservative route then would be to allow context to contribute to content even where that contribution is not syntactically triggered, as does contextualism. However, the worry both about minimalism and occasionalism see with this route is that, once one takes seriously the phenomenon thrown up by CSAs, then one has no reason to think that any context-independent specification of propositional content will be free from the possibility of running a CSA. Specifically, one cannot ameliorate the issue by claiming that an utterance of 'The apple is red' expresses the contextually enriched proposition that *the apple is red on the skin* since this proposition, no less than the first one, stands in need of contextual understanding. Thus it seems that if one feels the pull of CSAs then one needs a different picture of the way in which content and context hang together. Our final intermediary position offers one such different view: the

added parameters account treats contextual contributions not as part of propositional content but as having a role to play outside this, as forming the parameters against which propositions get assessed for truth. However the question now is what this talk of added parameters gets us: why think that 'the apple is red' expresses a proposition, though one which is not truth-evaluable outside of a context which specifies a particular understanding of what it is to be red, rather than thinking that determinacy of content itself is a feature found only within a context of use? While clearly a position which is technically available to us we need to know what work this added formalism really does for us, and this puts a lot of weight on the retraction/disagreement data which has been used to motivate the position thus far – a weight that it is not obvious it can bear (see Williamson 2005; Wright 2007a). Once again the worry is that it is the notion of pragmatic processes, of language in use, which is in the driving seat here with the attempt to dress it in formal clothes perhaps covering a theorist's modesty but doing little substantive explanatory work. Overall, then, minimalism and occasionalism are in agreement: where we seemed to have a well-populated middle ground, in reality the relatively new positions on the spectrum seem unstable. In reality, perhaps the only solid ground to be found comes at either end of our spectrum: either we join with minimalists and don't take CSAs seriously as indicative of a semantic phenomenon at all, or we join with occasionalists and take them so seriously that they help to shape our entire approach to semantics.

I'd like to close by considering one final point of agreement between minimalism and occasionalism and this concerns the kind of content which can be recovered independently from a context of utterance. For although Travis takes propositional meaning to be determined only in context this doesn't stop him from holding that we can provide standard lexical entries for expressions. Thus for Travis it is right to say things like 'green' means green, and that 'grunts' speaks of one being a grunter.

The meaning of an English expression makes it *for* saying a certain sort of thing in speaking English. The meaning of 'is blue', in making these words speak of being blue, makes it *for* (e.g.) calling something blue on the understanding there would then be of its being so. (2008: 154)

So words have meanings which make them suitable for assigning properties to objects or for saying things to be a certain way, but these meanings leave open, outside a context of use, what it would be for an object to count as having that property or for things to be as they are said to be. Now it seems that the minimalist could agree with much of this picture, for she holds that word meanings generalise over specific understandings of them – that the meaning of 'green' leaves open the way in which an object might be green

(on its surface, on the inside, etc). So it seems that both accounts agree that lexical content (and thus the complex content delivered by sentences) plays the role of a determinable, with many different states of affairs being its determinants. Where minimalism differs from occasionalism then is over the question of whether such determinable content can itself be thought of as genuine, truth-evaluable content. Travis is adamant that it can't:

[I]f I do not [speak of being a grunter on some particular understanding of being a grunter] then I fail to state any condition under which anything might be true. Being a grunter on no particular understanding of being one is just not a way for [anyone] to be. (2008: 159)

On the other hand the minimalist will hold that a sentence like 'Sid grunts' does state a condition for truth, namely it is true iff Sid grunts. Of course there are an indefinite number of more precise ways for this to be true (Sid might grunt all the time, after heavy exercise, when asleep, inaudibly, and so on), but the fact that there are indefinite ways to satisfy the truth condition does not, the minimalist maintains, mean that it is not a genuine truth-condition prior to this kind of precisification. The picture endorsed by the minimalist here then is a realist one with respect to properties – there is held to be a fact of the matter about whether or not Sid possesses the property of being a grunter and a statement that he is a grunter is true just in case he does possess this property, even though there may be some contextually salient way of being a grunter which Sid fails to satisfy.

Of course there are many more questions to be raised further down both lines, but the point I want to highlight here is the nature of the debate. Since even for Travis words do have meanings independent of the contexts in which they are produced and since these contents are ones that the minimalist will happily endorse for expressions the point of objection becomes whether or not this kind of content can itself count as yielding genuinely propositional or truth-conditional content. Thus despite the contemporary dress of the debate surveyed here it seems we come back to the basic point of contention which has existed between formal theories and use-based accounts from the very start: can words and sentences make claims about the world or is it only people using words which can achieve this? Sadly, nothing in the debate about CSAs seems to take us further on this fundamental point of difference.

Notes

* Thanks to an audience at Cardiff University for helpful discussion of this chapter. The chapter was written during the award of a Philip Leverhulme Prize.

1. It is this claim which holds minimalism apart from positions like Bach 2006; see n.4.

2. For more on what it is to be an 'intuitively obvious indexical', see Cappelen and Lepore 2005.
3. So, roughly, an utterance of 'That is red' in context *c* expresses a distinct syntactic item 'red_{*c*}' and an object satisfies 'red_{*c*}' iff it is red according to the contextual standard of redness in *c*.
4. We should note that the vocabulary here is somewhat tricky, for one could hold that semantic content is what one gets simply from paying attention to the syntactic features of a sentence, but maintain that this falls short of truth-conditional content, with the latter being delivered only via pragmatic processing, i.e. one could reject the first assumption attributed to minimalism above (see, e.g., Bach 2006; Sperber and Wilson 1986). To my mind, since this view accepts that (non-syntactically triggered) pragmatic enrichment is at least sometimes necessary to arrive at a truth-evaluable content, it warrants inclusion in this section (see Borg 2007 for further discussion).
5. Nothing here turns on the suggestion that we treat propositions as actually consisting of objects, properties and times.
6. MacFarlane (2009) notes this proliferation but doesn't see it as overly damaging.
7. Though the relativism may be limited to certain kinds of expressions, such as epistemic modals or predicates of taste.
8. The position to be outlined obviously does bear some affinities to contextualism and we might note that Cappelen and Lepore 2005 take Travis to be a central proponent of what they term 'radical contextualism' (which they define as claiming that all terms in natural language are context-sensitive). However, for reasons discussed below (see also Borg 2004: 224), contextualism and occasionalism are best held apart.
9. 'Every sign by itself seems dead. *What gives it life?* – In use it is alive' (PJ §432). See also Wittgenstein's discussion of 'shadows' (PO 59). There are of course interesting exegetical questions here concerning how accurate it is to call occasionalism 'Wittgensteinian' (see Bridges forthcoming); however, I will leave these more exegetical issues to one side.
10. We might also note that the idea that syntax determines semantics is weight-bearing in attempts to specify a language module as a purely computational system (see Borg 2004 for one such attempt).
11. Thus there seems to be a very real threat of circularity here: the indexicalist holds that syntax determines semantics but also allows that semantics (in part) determines syntax.
12. An *aphonic* element is a syntactic item which lacks phonetic properties. See also Bach 2007: §III.5
13. This line of argument is echoed directly in some pro-minimalist writings, for instance Borg 2004: 241.
14. Cf. 'To be a relativist, then, is not to relativize propositional truth to "nonstandard parameters" like standards of taste, but to adopt a certain view about how the accuracy of certain acts or states is to be assessed' (MacFarlane 2007: 26).
15. This is particularly so since most contemporary versions of relativism stress that they take the bearers of truth-evaluable content to be utterances, not sentences (see, e.g., Recanati 2007). Yet if it is only utterances not sentences that are capable of saying the world to be thus and so we seem to be pretty close to standard conceptions of use-based semantics.

16. And note that the provision of parameters on this approach will be a *thoroughly* pragmatic matter. Whereas the usual parameters of world and time can be provided via a formal consideration of the context of utterance, determining whether we need a parameter which appeals to a community standard of redness for apples, or a standard of redness for Braeburn apples, or a standard of redness for Braeburn apples picked before September and stored in the dark, will be something to be settled only by appeal to rich features of the context of utterance, including speaker intentions and shared knowledge among interlocutors. Thus, once again, it is *thoroughly* pragmatic processes which are doing all the work here, with the formal talk of parameters apparently serving little additional purpose.

also serve to help us see that OC §286 says nothing about the theoretical vulnerability of the relativist's position. This is so all the more since in the case of epistemic relativism Wittgenstein makes no effort to suggest that the expression of relativistic views is somehow linguistically defective.

12.14 Conclusion

I have tried to argue that reading OC against the backdrop of WRPL is fruitful in that it enables us better to understand the dialectic of OC, the continuity between the *Philosophical Investigations* and OC, and the considerations that push Wittgenstein in the general direction of epistemic relativism. I also like to think that following the proposal mooted here allows us to connect OC to contemporary debates in epistemology in a more systematic and tractable fashion. Needless to say, most of the work of identifying the remnants of knowledge mentalism in contemporary epistemology, and of extending Wittgenstein's criticism from the picture of knowledge mentalism to currently popular views, still remains to be done.

Notes

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1. All numbers not otherwise labelled refer to paragraphs in OC.
2. Knowing that *p* implies knowing that one knows that *p*.
3. Given Wittgenstein's general shift from truth conditions to propriety conditions, I find it hard to accept Duncan Pritchard's suggestion according to which Wittgenstein merely objects to Moore's asserting knowledge of common-sense certainties, but not to Moore's possessing such knowledge (cf. Pritchard forthcoming).
4. Limitations of space do not allow me to here relate my argument to Kripke's well-known discussion of Wittgenstein's quote in Kripke 1980: 55.

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