The Many Relativisms: Index, Context, and Beyond

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Abstract

This chapter presents a taxonomy of positions in recent debates on contextualism and relativism. Relativism in general is understood as the attempt to endorse appearances of faultless disagreement. Moderate relativisms will hold that this can be done within the framework in which the features of contexts determine the appropriate truth-value of sentences, whereas radical relativisms will contend that they motivate a departure from it, by allowing that one and the same sentence, as spoken in a particular context, be true when assessed from a given perspective but false when assessed from another. Among moderate relativist positions, one can distinguish indexical contextualism and non-indexical contextualism, in terms of whether the features of the different contexts determine different contents for the sentence, or whether these features determine different truth-values for one and the same content. A corresponding distinction can also be drawn among radical relativist positions between content relativism and truth relativism.

Introduction

In the past few years, there has been an explosion of literature on contextualism and relativism. The research concerns foundational issues in philosophy of language vis-à-vis debates in the philosophy of mind, epistemology, metaphysics, or metaethics, on topics such as future contingents, predicates of personal taste, evaluative predicates in general, epistemic modals, and knowledge attributions.

The inherent complexity of the issues themselves is compounded by the fact that not everyone uses the same characterizations of the relevant positions or uses the existing labels to refer to them in the same way. As a result, it is not always easy to establish what exactly is at stake in some of the discussions, and in fact some of them might actually turn out to be spurious.

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In what follows, I present the taxonomy that in my view is becoming standard. It is articulated along three distinctions. As we will see, the domains in question seem to exhibit cases of faultless disagreement: it seems possible that there are contrasting judgments without fault on anyone's part. I will propose that *relativism* is understood in general as the attempt to endorse such appearances of faultless disagreement (section 1). The different ways of implementing that general attempt will thus correspond to different relativism*s*. In my view, the most important distinction is that between *moderate* and *radical* relativisms. According to a classical semantic framework, features of the context in which a sentence is spoken determine its appropriate truth-value. Moderate relativisms will hold that appearances of faultless disagreement can indeed be endorsed within this framework, whereas radical relativisms will contend that they motivate a departure from it, by allowing that one and the same sentence, when said in a particular context, be true when assessed from a given perspective but false when assessed from another (section 2). The two other distinctions involve the notion of the content of a sentence. Among moderate relativist positions, one can distinguish *indexical contextualism* and *non-indexical contextualism* (section 3), in terms of whether the features of the different contexts determine different contents for the sentence, or whether these features determine different truth-values for one and the same content. A corresponding distinction can also be drawn among radical relativist positions between *content relativism* and *truth relativism* (section 4). As well as presenting these three distinctions, I will consider related but different characterizations that are also present in the literature. Finally, I will conclude by motivating the use of the label "relativism" here, contrasting it with some alternatives (section 5).

The aim of this chapter is to present the different positions, and not to argue in favor of any particular one of them in the domains mentioned. On occasions, I will allude to some of the relevant considerations, but only for illustrative purposes. Also, given my aim, I will focus on relatively simple examples, with the predicate "is funny," even though they are perhaps not among the philosophically most interesting ones.

The taxonomy is based on work by John MacFarlane (2003; 2005; 2009), and I will formulate it using terminology from David Lewis (1980). Some of the points I make in connection with it are based on, and elaborated further in, other work of mine (López de Sa 2003; 2007; 2009; MS-a, MS-b).

1. Relativism and Apparent Faultless Disagreement

It seems that Hannah and her sister Sarah may disagree as to whether Homer Simpson is funny, without either of them being at fault. This is an (almost) uncontroversial case of *apparent faultless disagreement*. Similarly, for disputes as to whether spinach is tasty or disgusting, or whether getting to the party late is cool or lame, or whether Brad Pitt and Uma Thurman are really sexy or rather overrated. With respect to issues like these, people often take contrasting views, which sometimes issue in (long) discussions and arguments. Still, it seems that none of the parties needs to be mistaken with regard to their contrasting views.

More cases are arguably provided in other philosophically interesting domains: predicates of personal taste, evaluative predicates in general, epistemic modals, and

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knowledge attributions. It seems that Hannah and Sarah may also disagree as to whether hurt-free infidelity is permissible, or whether Jason might already be back in town, or whether his brother Justin knows if the bank will be open tomorrow. With respect to any of these, it seems that the contrasting judgments need not involve fault on the part of any of the participants. As I said, the philosophically more interesting cases carry additional complexity. Given that my purpose here is to characterize the different positions in the recent literature on contextualism and relativism, in what follows I will focus on the relatively simple example of Hannah and Sarah's disagreement over whether Homer Simpson is funny. Hannah may have a judgment that she might naturally express in an ordinary context by uttering "Homer Simpson is funny," whereas Sarah may have a contrasting judgment she might naturally express in an ordinary context by uttering "Homer Simpson is not funny." And these contrasting judgments need not involve, apparently, any error on the part of either Hannah or Sarah.

Whether such an appearance of faultless disagreement is to be endorsed – or even whether it *could* be endorsed – is, of course, a matter of controversy. Following the lead of Crispin Wright (1992), I suggest that one conceives of *relativism* in general as precisely the attempt to endorse the appearances of faultless disagreement.

I said it is controversial whether the appearances of faultless disagreement are (can be) endorsed. But that such *appearances* exist is, I take it, a *datum* for non-relativists and relativists alike. Where relativists attempt to endorse appearances, non-relativists attempt to explain them away.

Notice that in order to characterize the phenomenon of apparent faultless disagreement, I referred to the appearance of there being *contrasting judgments* without fault. Some use "faultless disagreement" in a more restricted sense, requiring that there be a single content or "proposition" which is contrastingly judged: see, for instance, Kölbel (2003). According to the more restricted sense, as we will see, it cannot just be taken as a datum for non-relativists and relativists alike that there seem to be cases of faultless disagreement. Nor do all versions of relativism endorse that there are, in effect, cases of faultless disagreement in the relevant domains, in the restricted sense. These I take to favor my more liberal usage.

2.   The Many Relativisms: Moderate vs. Radical

So there *seem* to be cases of faultless disagreement in many domains and according to relativism with respect to these domains, appearances are to be endorsed: there are, in effect, cases of faultless disagreement.

If relativism in general is the attempt to endorse the appearance of faultless disagreement, the different relativism*s* correspond to the different ways of implementing the general attempt. In my view, the most important distinction is that between *moderate* and *radical* relativisms. As we will see, this is a distinction in terms of whether appearances of faultless disagreement can be endorsed within a classical semantic framework, or whether endorsing them requires us to depart from it. In order to formulate this framework I will adopt the terminology used by David Lewis (1980). Let me briefly summarize the main notions and their basic motivation.

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According to Lewis, the *semantic values* of sentences must determine both which sentences are true in which contexts, and how the truth of a sentence varies when certain features of contexts are shifted – so as to help determine the semantic values of larger sentences having sentences as constituents. In order to do this, Lewis distinguishes between *contexts* and *indices*.

A *context* is a particular concrete location – a spatiotemporally centered world – in which a sentence might be uttered. A context has countless features, determined by the character of the location. It thus encodes things such as the speaker of the sentence and the time and place in which the sentence is spoken, but also things such as the body of knowledge or standard of taste that are made salient in the conversation that takes place around the center of the context, and so on. This richness of contexts guarantees the availability of features on which the truth of sentences might turn out to depend, and thus supersedes attempts (including Lewis's own earlier one) to isolate tuples of features that are relevant for the truth of sentences.

An *index*, by contrast, is indeed a tuple of features of contexts, but not necessarily features that go together in any possible context. Thus, as Lewis says, an index might consist of a speaker, a time before her birth, a world where she never lived at all, and so on. Because of that, the coordinates of an index can be shifted independently, and can thus be used to systematize the contribution of sentences embedded under sentence operators, such as "it is possible that" or, more controversially, "somewhere," "strictly speaking," and so on. In order to evaluate, for instance, "It is possible that dodos are not extinct" at an actual context *c*, one needs to find out the truth-value of "Dodos are extinct" once the world feature of *c* has shifted to a merely possible world.

The reason why we need both contexts and indices, as introduced, is nicely summarized by Lewis himself:

> Since we are unlikely to think of all the features of context on which truth sometimes depends, and hence unlikely to construct adequately rich indices, we cannot get by without context-dependence as well as index-dependence. Since indices but not contexts can be shifted one feature at a time, we cannot get by without index-dependence as well as context-dependence.
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> ... An assignment of semantic values must give us the relation: sentence *s* is true at context *c* at index *i*, where *i* need not be the index that gives the features of context *c*. Fortunately, an index used together with a context in this way need not give all the relevant features of context; only the shiftable features, that are much fewer. (1980: 21–22)

So the richness of contexts guarantees the availability of features on which the truth of sentences might turn out to depend, and the independent shiftability of the coordinates of indices makes them suitable to account for the contribution of constituent sentences under operators of the language.

An assignment of semantic values should thus determine the general relation of a sentence *s* being true at context *c* at an arbitrary index *i*, where the coordinates of *i* need not go together in *c* – or in any possible context, for that matter. But each context *c* does determine one particular index: the index having coordinates that match the appropriate features of *c*. This is *the index of the context*, i_c.

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Thus, a special case of the general relation of a sentence s being true at context c at an arbitrary index i gives rise to the characteristic contention of the classical semantic framework, to the effect that they are features of the context where a sentence is uttered that determine its appropriate truth-value: sentence s is true at context c iff s is true at context c at its index i_c.

(It is important to emphasize that the features that are coordinates in i_c need not be *all* the features of c on which the truth of the sentence s depends, nor need they be the *only* features of c on which the truth of the sentence s depends. They are just the features that are shiftable by an operator of the language, possibly occurring in s. It is the richness of c alluded to above that guarantees that whichever features might turn out to be relevant for truth will be available by being determined by c's character. As we will see, indices thus contrast with *circumstances of evaluation*, which are indeed tuples of features *relevant for truth* (of contents of sentences at contexts).)

According to *moderate relativism*, endorsing appearances of faultless disagreement can be done within this general classical semantic framework. It seems that Hannah and Sarah may disagree as to whether Homer Simpson is funny without either of them being at fault, and indeed this can actually be so in virtue of some feature of Hannah's context (say, Hannah's sense of humor) making true the sentence "Homer Simpson is funny," and some feature of Sarah's context (say, Sarah's different sense of humor) making false the sentence "Homer Simpson is funny." In general, according to moderate relativism, appearances of faultless disagreement are manifested by a certain sort of contextual variation of sentences' appropriate truth-values: it seems that sentence s can be true at a certain context c but false at another context c^*. Endorsement of such appearances can be done respecting the moderate characteristic contention, as it may in effect be the case that s is true at c (at its index i_c) but false at c^* (at i_{c^*}), in virtue of different features of c and c^*.

(The element of *faultlessness* in apparent faultless disagreement is thus accounted for. Nevertheless, does the sense in which they are in contrast with one another fully capture the intuitive element of *disagreement?* On this, see the discussion in the next section.)

Recently, and partly motivated by the work of John MacFarlane, some people have been convinced that this framework is shown to be inappropriate by a special sort of variation in some philosophically interesting cases: a sentence s as said in a particular context c could still be true *from a certain perspective* but false from another – where *perspectives* are to be thought of as the same sort of thing as contexts, but representing a location from where a sentence, as said in a (possibly different) location, is viewed or assessed. To illustrate, "Homer Simpson is funny" as said at Hannah's context could still be true when viewed or assessed from the perspective of that very context, but false when viewed or assessed from another perspective, say that of Sarah's context. This certainly departs from the classical semantic framework as characterized above. Within the framework, "Homer Simpson is funny" as said at Hannah's context (with respect to the index that this determines) settles the appropriate truth-value, which is thus insensitive to the perspective from where it can be viewed or assessed. The departure of the framework consisting in allowing that the appropriate truth-value of a sentence as said in a context be sensitive to the perspective from which it is assessed constitutes *radical relativism*. Radical relativists in this sense (with respect to some domains) include

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John MacFarlane (e.g., 2003; 2007) and Peter Lasersohn (2005). (I propose to use "perspectives" instead of MacFarlane's "contexts of assessment." I think this terminology helps to avoid confusions with "*context* of use/utterance" ("context" here) and, more importantly, with "circumstance of *evaluation*" – see below.)

This is, of course, an essentially *negative* characterization of the position. Radical relativism is indeed an extremely radical claim, and part of the recent literature on contextualism and relativism concerns precisely whether it is conceivable that there be a language containing at least one such perspective-sensitive (or "assessment-sensitive") sentence. Some hold that it is not conceivable, so that the position is ultimately unintelligible, and only negative characterizations of it can be available. The main kinds of consideration are connected with Evansian misgivings as to whether it would make sense to assert one such sentence: how could it be rational for me ever to assert sentence *s* at *c* if its appropriate truth-value can be sensitive to features of perspectives completely unconstrained by the character of the context? For discussion, see MacFarlane (2003; 2005).

Suppose that this sort of misgiving is shown to be misguided. A more descriptive issue remains: that is, whether the phenomenon of apparent faultless disagreement in the various domains is indeed exhausted by the kind of contextual variation accountable within moderation, or, rather, whether some of them do motivate departure towards radical relativism. Another part of the recent literature on contextualism and relativism concerns this second kind of issue.

2.1   Aside: Moderation without absoluteness

In the paper that is partly responsible for the recent interest in radical relativism among philosophers of language, MacFarlane (2003: sect. 4) offered an alternative, also negative, characterization of the position: that of denying that utterance-truth is absolute. This has proven very popular in conferences and discussions, and is also endorsed by Egan et al.:

> [R]elativist theories deny Absoluteness of Utterance Truth, the claim that if an utterance is true relative to one context of evaluation it is true relative to all of them. It is uncontroversial of course that the truth value of an utterance type can be contextually variable, the interesting claim that relativists make is that the truth value of utterance tokens can also be different relative to different contexts. (2005: 154)

As I argue elsewhere (López de Sa 2009), this won't do. (In fact, in his more recent works MacFarlane himself has not used the characterization of denying the absoluteness of utterance-truth, although for reasons different from the one to be offered.)

The thought behind the proposal seems to be the following one. Moderate views have it that a sentence and a context (and the index of that context) determine the appropriate truth-value. Particular tokens of a given sentence also require a context in order to get their truth-values, as witnessed by post-it tokens of "I'll be back in five minutes": one of them might be true on Monday, but false on Tuesday. But *if* the particular act of uttering a particular token of a sentence were to determine, by itself, a

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particular context, then moderate views would have it that *utterances* have their absolute truth-values. Radical relativism could then be characterized as denying such a claim of absolute utterance-truth.

The problem with the proposal is that the antecedent of the emphasized conditional does not hold true on many people's views on modality. Utterance-truth being absolute requires that the particular act of uttering a particular token of a sentence does determine one (unique) context: *the* context of the utterance. A (unique) context, in turn, determines a (unique) possible world. Thus, utterance-truth being absolute requires that the particular act of uttering a particular token of a sentence determines one (unique) possible world: *the* world of the utterance. On many views of modality, however, things like the particular act of uttering a particular token of a sentence are not conceived as "world-bound" entities in this way, but rather are held to exist – occur in, take place in, be part of – *many* different worlds. Some moderate views are compatible with these views of modality. But, as we have just seen, utterance-truth being absolute is not. Thus moderate views as such are not committed to utterance-truth being absolute. Therefore radical relativism cannot be characterized as denying that utterance-truth is absolute – for some moderate views do that as well.

Let me illustrate this with an example. Plausibly, a particular act of uttering a particular token of "Dodos are extinct" is independent of whether dodos are extinct. On some views on modality, this entails that the particular act of uttering also exists in a counterfactual situation in which dodos are not extinct. But then the given particular act of uttering does not have a truth-value absolutely: it is true with respect to the context that involves the actual world, but false with respect to the alternative context that involves the counterfactual situation in which it also exists, but in which dodos are alive. The defender of a moderate view is not committed to hold such a view – according to which utterances take place in more than one world; but nor is she committed to hold the contrasting view – that they are merely counterparts of the particular utterance itself that inhabit these other worlds. The issue as to which of these different modal views is correct is orthogonal with respect to which of the moderate or radical versions of relativism (if any) one holds. Therefore, the defender of moderate views can hold, her moderation notwithstanding, that the particular act of uttering a particular token of "Dodos are extinct" does not have its truth-value absolutely – thus proving the characterization of radical relativism in terms of the denial of the absoluteness of utterance-truth to be inappropriate.

3.   Moderate Relativisms: Indexical vs. Non-indexical Contextualism

Relativism in general, I am suggesting, can be conceived as the attempt to endorse appearances of faultless disagreement. And the main distinction between moderate and radical relativism is (a) whether context determines the appropriate truth-value for sentences, or (b) whether truth-values can vary depending on the perspective from which the sentence is viewed or assessed. This is thus a distinction that depends exclusively on claims concerning the appropriate truth-value of sentences in particular contexts, and does not involve the notion of the content of a sentence.

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If such a notion of the content or "proposition" of a sentence is introduced, two further distinctions become available. Among moderate relativist positions, one can distinguish between *indexical* and *non-indexical contextualism*, in terms of whether the features of the different contexts determine different contents for the sentence, or whether these features determine different truth-values for one and the same content. And a corresponding distinction can also be drawn among radical relativist positions between *content relativism* and *truth relativism*, as we will see in the next section.

More explicitly, appearances of faultless disagreement can be endorsed, according to moderate relativism, by its possibly being the case that in effect *s* is true at *c* (at its index i_c) but false at *c** (at i_{c*}). According to *indexical contextualism*, this is so in virtue of the *content* of sentence *s* at *c* being different from that of *s* at *c**. According to *non-indexical contextualism*, the content of *s* at *c* is the same as at *c**, but the truth-value it receives with respect to the relevant features of *c* is different from the one it receives with respect to the relevant (different) features of *c**.

The distinction between indexical and non-indexical contextualism thus requires the introduction of the notion *content of a sentence content of s at a context c*. What are these contents? In my view, the best attempt to introduce them is via the objects of attitudes somehow associated with sentences.

The easiest way won't do, however. A sentence *s* and a context *c* determine the following function from indices to truth-values: what makes true an index *i* iff *s* is true at *c* at *i*. Such a function, however, may easily fail to model appropriately the objects of attitudes. Remember that an index is a tuple of shiftable features of context by operators of the language. Suppose that Lewis is right and "It has been that ...," "somewhere ...," "It must be that ...," and "strictly speaking ..." are operators in the relevant sense. Then time, place, world, and (some aspects of) standard of precisions are coordinates of indices (Lewis 1980: 27). But it cannot be assumed that the objects of one's beliefs and desires are only true relative to such features.

Other functions from tuples of features of contexts to truth-values might do. Some people use "proposition" to mean the object of – precisely so-called *propositional* – attitudes; and some people use "proposition" for functions from worlds to truth-values. The existence of these two usages wouldn't generate trouble for those who – and only those who – think that the objects of attitudes are indeed to be modeled by functions from worlds to truth-values. A "proposition" would then be true only relative to a certain feature of contexts, namely a world. But as we are about to see, "propositions" in the first sense need not be "propositions" in the second sense – that's why in a discussion like the present one it might be better just to adopt an expression other than "proposition." Following Lewis, let *content* be the object of one's attitudes, to be modeled by functions from tuples of features of contexts to truth-values.

Some people think that the world is not the only feature of context to which the truth-value of the contents of one's attitudes is relative. Maybe relative to a given world, a content is true at some times but false at some others. In that case, contents would be associated with functions from worlds and times to truth-values. Or maybe relative to a given world, a content is true relative to some taste-standard but not relative to some other. In that case, contents would be associated with functions from worlds and standards to truth-values. The same goes for senses of humor, bodies of knowledge, and so on and so forth.

For present purposes, one can conceive of *circumstances of evaluation* as the tuples of features of context to which the truth of contents is relativized. It is important to emphasize that, as alluded to above, although both indices and circumstances of evaluation are tuples of features of contexts, it cannot be assumed that the same kinds of feature would figure in both. A given feature would be a coordinate of indices if there is an operator in the language that shifts it, and need not be an element of circumstances of evaluation if the truth of the object of one's attitudes is not relative to it. And conversely, the features that have to be specified in order for a content to acquire a truth-value would thereby enter the circumstances, but not necessarily the indices, unless they turn out to be shiftable by an operator of the language.

(As I argue elsewhere (López de Sa MS-a), attention to these two different roles that features of context can play may contribute to resolving some recent apparent disputes as to which kind of consideration would motivate relativization of truth to a given sort of feature. The situation is complicated further by the fact that some authors, arguably including Kaplan (1989) and MacFarlane (2009), seem to use the expression "circumstance of evaluation" for tuples comprising features playing one or the other of the two roles altogether.)

As a first approximation, one can talk about the *content of a sentence at a context* with something somehow along the lines of: the content of *s* at *c* is the content of the belief one would express by uttering *s* at *c*. (This would obviously require all sorts of finessing that I cannot attempt here.) Assuming that each context determines one particular circumstance of evaluation, plausibly the content of *s* at *c* is true relative to the circumstance determined by *c* iff *s* at *c* is true.

(Some may want to identify the content of *s* at *c* with "what is said" by *s* at *c*. I tend to side with Lewis here: "Unless we give it some special technical meaning, the locution 'what is said' is very far from univocal. It can mean propositional content, in Stalnaker's sense (horizontal or diagonal). It can mean the exact words. I suspect it can mean almost anything in between" (Lewis 1980: 41).)

With the notion of the content of a sentence at a context in place, one can then distinguish indexical and non-indexical contextualism as different implementations of endorsing the appearances of faultless disagreement within moderation. Take again Hannah and Sarah's disagreement as to whether Homer Simpson is funny, without either of them being at fault. According to more traditional indexical versions of contextualism, the sentence "Homer Simpson is funny" may have a different content in Hannah's context (involving in some way Hannah's sense of humor, say) than in Sarah's context (involving in some way Sarah's different sense of humor, say). The contents being different, it may well be that one of them is true (in one context) while the other is false (in the other context). But an alternative, less traditional way of endorsing appearances of faultless disagreement within moderation is provided by non-indexical contextualism. The content of the sentence "Homer Simpson is funny" can be the same in Hannah's and Sarah's contexts. Still, the contextual variation of truth-value can be accounted for if the different features of the contexts enter the circumstance of evaluation, so that that very same content can be true relative to (say) Hannah's sense of humor, but false relative to Sarah's different sense of humor.

In general, as we saw, according to moderate relativism, appearances of faultless disagreement are manifested by a certain sort of contextual variation of sentences'

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appropriate truth-values, and endorsement of such appearances can be done respecting the contention that the features of contexts determine the truth-values of sentences, by holding that it may in effect be the case that s is true at c but false at c^* in virtue of different features between c and c^*. According to indexical contextualism, the different features of c and c^* make it the case that the content of sentence s at c is different from that of s at c^*, so that s at c can be true while s at c^* is false. According to non-indexical contextualism, the different features of c and c^* make it the case that the same content of sentence s at c and at c^* receives a different value with respect to the circumstances of c and of c^*, so that, again, s at c can be true while s at c^* is false. Most traditional forms of (moderate) relativism are arguably versions of indexical contextualism (for a recent version of non-indexical contextualism, see Recanati 2007).

It seems pretty straightforward that indexical contextualism accounts for the faultlessness of the judgments which could be expressed by using s at c but not at c^*. What about the facts involving intuitions of disagreement, as revealed in ordinary disputes in the domain? Part of the recent literature on contextualism and relativism concerns whether such a position vindicates them, after all. Here is Wright's particularly vivid voicing of the worry that it might not (see also Kölbel 2004; Lasersohn 2005):

> If [indexical contextualism] were right, there would be an analogy between dispute of inclinations and the "dispute" between one who says "I am tired" and her companion who replies, "Well, I am not" (when what is at issue is one more museum visit). There are the materials here, perhaps, for a (further) disagreement but no disagreement has yet been expressed. But ordinary understanding already hears a disagreement between one who asserts that hurt-free infidelity is acceptable and one who asserts that it is not. (Wright 2001: 451)

To the extent to which the difficulty has to do with the absence, according to indexical contextualism, of a common content of the relevant sentence across the relevant contexts, the worry would not arise with respect to alternative non-indexical contextualist versions of moderate relativism. (It is, however, controversial that intuitions of disagreement are linked to existence of a common content in the way just suggested.)

I have argued (López de Sa 2003; 2008) that commonality of content is not necessary in order to account for intuition of disagreement as revealed in ordinary disputes on these matters. Suppose that "is funny" triggers the presupposition to the effect that the speaker and addressee share a sense of humor. Now consider Hannah and Sarah once again. According to the suggestion, "is funny" triggers a presupposition of commonality to the effect that both Hannah and Sarah are similar with respect to humor. Thus, in any non-defective conversation where Hannah uttered "Homer is funny" and Sarah replied "No, he is not," it would indeed be common ground that Hannah and Sarah are relevantly alike, and thus that they are contradicting each other.

In the other direction, MacFarlane (2007) has argued that commonality of content is not sufficient. Take "Dodos are extinct," and consider an actual utterance of it and a counterfactual one in a world where they were not extinct. According to most people, the content of "Dodos are extinct" is the same across the two contexts, but is evaluated differently with respect to the world component of the different circumstances of evaluation. But according to MacFarlane, one would be reluctant to describe as a

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disagreement the contrast between the judgment I would express by uttering "Dodos are extinct" and the one of my informed counterfactual self in the other world.

Another part of the recent literature on contextualism and relativism concerns which of the positions fares better with respect to intuitions concerning the truth-value of indirect reports, such as Sarah saying "Hannah said that Homer was funny" or Hannah saying "Sarah doesn't believe that Homer is funny."

3.1   Aside: Relative "propositional" truth

One kind of position that is very often characterized as relativist is the one that holds that "propositional" truth is relative, in the sense that contents of sentences in context are true or false only relative to some non-standard feature (other than a world, and perhaps time, standard of precision and so on). Here is a recent instance:

> Consider the following [sentence]:
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> (1)   Whale meat is tasty.
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> ... Sentence (1), according to relativist semantics, is not an indexical sentence, i.e. it semantically expresses the same proposition in all contexts of use. However, even though (1) expresses the same proposition in all contexts, that proposition can vary in truth-value with the circumstances of evaluation. ... [T]he relativist has in mind a variation in truth-value that goes beyond relativity to possible worlds. The relativist claims that even once we hold the possible world fixed, the value of the proposition that whale meat is tasty still varies with a standard of evaluation. We might call this the "standard of taste parameter" in the circumstances of evaluation. (Kölbel 2009: 383; see also Kölbel 2004; Stanley 2005: ch. 7; Zimmerman 2007)

As I argue elsewhere (López de Sa 2007; see also MacFarlane 2005), both non-indexical contextualist versions of moderate relativism and versions of radical relativism would vindicate the contention. Consider the view that contents' truth-values are relative to, say, senses of humor or moral codes or bodies of knowledge or what-have-you. Is it the context that fixes the appropriate features of circumstances? If so, it can preserve the moderate characteristic claim that it is the context's features that determine truth, as in non-indexical contextualist versions of moderate relativism. Or have the circumstances been radically expanded, by including features fixed by the perspective from which the statements are viewed or assessed? In that case, one departs from moderation, as in radical relativism.

Attention to this might contribute to clarifying that some of those describing themselves as relativists might actually be defending indexical contextualist versions of moderate relativism, as opposed to radical relativism as defended by MacFarlane. (In my view, this might be the case in Egan et al. 2005.) Both arguments for and objections to the view that "propositional" truth is relative, as considered, might be differently effective with respect to moderate and radical versions of it. As I have been emphasizing, I regard the distinction between moderate and radical relativisms as the most fundamental in the recent literature on contextualism and relativism. The characterization of relativism via relative "propositional" truth would be insensitive to such a distinction, as it would unite some versions of one and the other.

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4.   Radical Relativism: Content vs. Truth Relativism

So far, we have seen that, according to moderate relativism, appearances of faultless disagreement are manifested in a characteristic contextual variation of the truth-values of sentences, and can be endorsed respecting the contention that it is the features of contexts that determine the truth-values of sentences. Once the notion of the content of a sentence at a context is introduced, two implementations can be distinguished, depending on whether the different features of the contexts make it the case that different contents are attributed to the sentence, thus allowing for variation in truth-value, or whether the different features directly enrich the circumstances of evaluation of the different contexts, with respect to which one and the same content truth-values are relative.

By contrast, according to radical relativism, a given sentence as said at a particular context can be true when viewed or assessed from a certain perspective but false when viewed or assessed from another. Within radicalism, the notion of a content of a sentence could also be introduced, allowing for a distinction that can be regarded as structurally analogous to that of indexical vs. non-indexical contextualism within moderation.

According to *content relativism*, a given sentence at a given context can be assigned different contents or "propositions" with respect to different perspectives. According to *truth relativism*, a given sentence at a given context is assigned just one content or "proposition," but one that is evaluated differently with respect to different features of the different perspectives. (MacFarlane (2005: 312) used "expressive relativism" and "propositional relativism" for content relativism and truth relativism, respectively, but more recently he has adopted the latter terminology, introduced by Egan et al. 2005.) Radical relativists with respect to a domain tend to be truth-relativist, like MacFarlane himself, but Weatherson (2009) advances a content-relativist version of radical relativism.

Notice that, within moderation, the circumstance of evaluation of a context is the tuple of features of that context with respect to which the content of a sentence at that context receives a truth-value. Beyond moderation, one can radically extend the notion, conceiving of circumstances of evaluation as the tuples of features of contexts *and perspectives* with respect to which contents receive a truth-value. Thus, according to the more popular truth-relativist version of radical relativism, the content of a sentence at a context assessed from a perspective may receive a truth-value relative to a circumstance of evaluation that contains features of that perspective rather than features of the context.

4.1   Aside: Audience-sensitivity

I have illustrated the content-relativist version of radical relativism with Weatherson (2009). The kind of view is sometimes attributed to Egan (2009). I think this is incorrect, and it is instructive to see why, as it may shed some light on the nature of the positions characterized. In order to do so, let me first quote something Kaplan says when considering recorded messages and the like:

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> Donnellan has suggested that if there were typically a significant lag of time between our production of speech and its audition (for example, if sound traveled very very slowly), our language might contain two forms of "now": one for the time of production, another for the time of audition. (Kaplan 1989: fn. 12)

Suppose that "now_{prod}" and "now_{aud}" were such forms, and in particular that "now_{aud}" refers to the time of audition. "now_{aud}" seems to be audience-sensitive: arguably, if you say "it's raining now_{aud}" to both Anders and Dylan, the content or "proposition" assigned relative to Anders is that it is raining at the time Anders hears it, whereas the content or "proposition" assigned relative to Dylan is that it is raining at the time Dylan hears it.

The expression "now_{aud}" need not motivate a content-relativist version of radical relativism. To see why, suppose I am assessing your linguistic exchange with Dylan. From my perspective, it is still the case that the content or "proposition" assigned to the sentence as uttered in your original context of use with respect to Dylan's concerns Dylan's time of audition, not my time of assessment.

The same seems to be true of Egan's "you":

> Horton produces a billboard on which is written the sentence, "Jesus loves you." ... So when Frank reads the billboard, "you" picks out Frank, and when Daniel reads the bill-board a bit later, "you" picks out Daniel.
>
> ... Here is another case – a secular one, this time – of the same sort of phenomenon in spoken language: Tony Robbins says, in the course of a motivational seminar, "You can take control of your life!" Suppose Frank and Daniel are both in attendance at the seminar. Once again, the natural thing to say is that what's conveyed to Frank is the singular proposition about Frank, and what's conveyed to Daniel is the singular proposition about Daniel. (Egan 2009: 259, 264)

As Egan himself observes (2009: fn 29), he is in effect arguing in favor of a form of audience-sensitivity as opposed to a content-relativist version of radical relativism. If "you" were perspective-sensitive, and if I were to assess the complex linguistic exchange between Horton and Frank, the relevant factor would be if Jesus loved *me*, not Frank. I explore how to accommodate this sort of phenomenon of audience-sensitivity within the moderate framework as introduced above in López de Sa (MS-a).

Cappelen (2008) calls "content relativism" a view according to which the content or "proposition" assigned to a sentence at a context (of utterance) varies between contexts of interpretation, where "a *context of interpretation* is just what you would think it is: a context from which an utterance is interpreted" (Cappelen 2008: fn. 8). It is not clear whether the "interpretation" alluded to here is the mechanism involved in the presence of audience-sensitive expression or that involving perspectives which would motivate a content-relativist version of radical relativism.

5. The Many "Relativism's

Let me take stock.

I have proposed understanding *relativism* in general as the attempt to endorse appearances of faultless disagreement, constituted by contrasting judgments without

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fault on the part of any of the subjects. I have presented what I think is the most important distinction between moderate and radical versions of relativism, depending on whether the attempt is carried out within the classical semantic framework in which features of the context where a sentence is uttered determine its appropriate truth-value, or whether it involves a departure from it, by allowing that one very same sentence as said in a particular context is true when assessed from a given perspective, but false when assessed from another.

To the extent to which one can introduce the notion of the content or "proposition" assigned to a sentence in a context, one can distinguish among moderate relativist positions between *indexical* and *non-indexical contextualism*, in terms of whether the different features of the different contexts are involved in assigning different contents for the sentence at those contexts, or, rather, are involved in the circumstances of evaluation of those contexts with respect to which one and the same content is evaluated.

If one departs from moderation and introduces the notion of the content or "proposition" assigned to a sentence in a context with respect to a perspective, one can distinguish among radical relativist positions between *content* and *truth relativism*, in terms of whether a sentence at a context can be assigned different contents or "propositions" with respect to different perspectives, or whether it is assigned just one content or "proposition" that is evaluated differently with respect to different features of the different perspectives.

As I said at the beginning, I think this is the taxonomy that is becoming standard in the recent literature on contextualism and relativism. Let me clarify that what I think is becoming standard is the taxonomy itself, and not necessarily the labels I have decided to use to refer to the taxons. I want to end by contrasting them with some alternative usages by MacFarlane (2005, *inter alia*) and Weatherson (2009).

Both MacFarlane and Weatherson use "contextualism" and "relativism" to refer to (what I have been calling) *moderate relativism* and *radical relativism*, respectively. I myself have no quarrel with using "contextualism" for moderate relativism. (Some might prefer to reserve the label for just (what I have been calling) *indexical contextualism*, but I am convinced by MacFarlane (2009) that the similarities between indexical and non-indexical contextualism vindicate the use of "contextualism" for both kinds of view.) I am nonetheless reluctant to use "relativism" for just (what I have been calling) *radical relativism*. I offer two considerations on behalf of my final decision to use the label "relativism" for the general attempt to endorse appearances of faultless disagreement. The first one is indeed philosophical in nature: all views that attempt to endorse appearances of faultless disagreement share a fundamental commonality versus views that attempt to explain these appearances away, and of a sort traditionally associated with the expression "relativism." The second consideration is more sociological in character: many of the views that have been developed under the label of "relativism" in recent decades, such as Harmanian and Dreierian views on moral terms, would fail to qualify as relativist, if one were to adopt the more restrictive usage.

With respect to the contrast between indexical and non-indexical relativism, I have adopted MacFarlane's labels. Emphasizing its structural similarity, Weatherson (2009) has suggested "indexical relativism" and "non-indexical relativism" for (what I have

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been calling) *content* and *truth relativism*, respectively. I admire his attempt to follow a systematic naming scheme, but there were two reasons for not following him in this. The first is my misgiving concerning the use of "relativism" for the more restrictive kind of view just mentioned. Second, and relatedly, the label "indexical relativism" has often been used precisely to refer to versions of indexical contextualism (see, for instance, Wright 2001; López de Sa 2003; Kölbel 2004); confusion therefore seems to me to be inevitable, and it would be better to avoid the expression.

As I said in the introduction, my aim here has been to present the various positions, rather than to argue in favor of any particular one of them in the different domains. My hope is that this will help to shed light on what is at stake in the various debates in the recent literature on contextualism and relativism.

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