PRAISE FOR INSENSITIVE SEMANTICS

“This book is an ingenious defense of two positions not widely thought to be compatible: truth-conditional semantics, on the one hand, and semantic minimalism (the view that extra-linguistic context has only a minimal effect on semantic content) on the other. Cappelen and Lepore’s highly controversial views are already, and will continue to be, at the center of inquiry into the nature of linguistic communication.”

JASON STANLEY, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

“To what extent should a theory of human semantic competence incorporate an account of context-dependence? Cappelen and Lepore offer an interesting answer; namely, only to the extent that, by virtue of the meanings of certain linguistic forms, it absolutely has to. Particular examples will be debated, and we may hope clarified, as the scope and limits of semantic investigation are drawn more tightly. In the meantime, Cappelen and Lepore have performed a singular service in bringing together the threads of the contextualist debate, and in formulating a minimalist alternative to some current trends.”

JAMES HIGGINBOTHAM, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

“This is a pleasingly spare yet instructively sophisticated account of how Davidsonians can accommodate the massive context sensitivity of language use. And the authors offer powerful arguments that suggest limits, rarely respected, on attempts to diagnose this sensitivity in terms of indexicality. Good stuff.”

PAUL PIETROSKI, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
Insensitive Semantics

A Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism

Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore
Herman Cappelen dedicates this volume to Kat

Ernie Lepore dedicates it to two old friends – Brian McLaughlin, who taught him life, and Barry Loewer, who retaught him philosophy
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From the end of the nineteenth century right up until today, Philosophy of Language has been plagued by an extensive, and notoriously confusing, literature on how to draw the distinction between semantic content and non-semantic content, or, in a terminology we prefer not to use, on how to draw the distinction between semantic and pragmatic content. This debate, at its deepest level, is about how to accommodate context sensitivity within a theory of human communication. It is concerned with the way in which contexts of utterance influence communicative interactions (and, as a corollary, what a context of utterance is and what it is to be in one). It is impossible to take a stand on any issue in the philosophy of language without being clear on these issues because what you consider as evidence for a semantic theory depends on how these distinctions are ultimately drawn. And it doesn’t stop there. Epistemologists, metaphysicians, philosophers of mind, ethicists, aestheticians, philosophical logicians, psychologists, linguists, anthropologists, literary critics, cognitive scientists, and perhaps, everyone else, live by claims about whether this or that expression is context sensitive or not. More often than not, theorists conclude that a lot more context sensitivity abounds than one might have thought. All such claims presuppose a general theory of the role of context in human communication.

Our ambitious goal in this book is to defend a simple and naive view about context sensitivity, the kind of view you might come up with after just a few moments’ reflection. Our view goes something like this: There are just a few easily identifiable context sensitive expressions in natural language. In English, they are familiar words like ‘I,’ ‘you,’ ‘that,’ ‘now,’ etc. In essence, our view is that there are no deep secrets or hidden surprises behind that ‘etc.’

To this end, we defend a combination of two views, both of which we have given fancy names: Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism. If
these views are right (and they are), then numerous philosophers and linguists are guilty of some very profound mistakes. Not only that, but if we are right, then the chief theses of a significant number of published articles and books are based on an internally inconsistent view. In this sense, our view is deeply critical of the last century of the literature on these issues. Since we are making these rather bold claims about colleagues’ views, we try to be very careful in our presentations of the views we criticize. We have included extensive exegetical sections. As a result, our readers will, we hope, end up not only with a presentation of the correct view, but also with a clear understanding of the structure of the last one hundred years of debate about these issues.

The central opponents in this book are philosophers and linguists who inflate the role of context in semantics. We call such philosophers Contextualists. The common thread that runs throughout our criticism of contextualism is that it fails to account for how we communicate across contexts. People with different background beliefs, goals, audiences, perceptual inputs, etc. can understand each other. They can agree or disagree. They can say, assert, claim, state, investigate, or make fun of the very same claim. No theory of communication is adequate unless it explains how this is possible. Contextualists cannot provide such an explanation. The solution proposed in this book is a context insensitive semantics (i.e. the view we call Semantic Minimalism), combined with Speech Act Pluralism.
Eight years ago we wrote ‘On an Alleged Connection between Semantic Theory and Indirect Speech.’ Since then we have written a series of related papers on speech act content, semantic content, and various versions of contextualism in the philosophy of language. This book supersedes several of those papers which are yet to reach print – even though they were written well in advance of this book. Apparently some authors can’t make deadlines no matter how long editors are prepared to extend them. However, this book refines and unifies these published papers and we hope soon to be published earlier papers.

Before our collaboration, Lepore had written a series of papers on Davidson with Barry Loewer in the 1980s, a forthcoming two-volume book with Kirk Ludwig on Davidson’s philosophy of language, and a book and numerous articles with Jerry Fodor on the nature of content and compositionality. These all played crucial roles in forging his commitment to Semantic Minimalism. Cappelen’s initial encounter with Radical Contextualism came in an exceptionally thought provoking seminar given by François Recanati at the University of California at Berkeley in 1994 (these lectures provided the basis for Recanati’s Literal Meaning). Discussions with Recanati and other seminar participants (including Stephen Neale and John Searle) started Cappelen down the road towards Semantic Minimalism. Our largest joint influence has been Jason Stanley. He together with Zoltán Szabó wrote a paper defending contextualism for quantifier domain specification. Working through their paper combined with an almost continuous all-out-all-systems-go conversation with Jason jumpstarted this book. We owe each and every one (read unrestrictedly) of these philosophers a debt for help and inspiration.

There have been many others. Drafts of these chapters have been presented on five continents and to literally dozens of institutions and con-
ferences. We have each taught the volume several times at the undergraduate and graduate levels. We thank the participants of all of these events; in particular, in no order of significance (and with apologies in advance to anyone we may have forgotten), we thank: Kent Bach, Mark Baker, Anne Bezuidenhout, Dan Blair, Emma Borg, Manuel García-Carpintiero, Robyn Carston, David Chalmers, Jennifer Church, Lenny Clapp, Eros Corrara, Sam Cumming, Martin Davies, Ray Elugardo, Chris Gaulker, Michael Glanzberg, Peter Godfrey-Smith, Delia Graff, Gill Harman, John Hawthorne, Jessica Hughes, Kent Johnson, David Kaplan, Chris Kennedy, Jeff King, Karson Kovakovich, Richard Larson, Sarah Jane Leslie, Peter Ludlow, Kirk Ludwig, Brian McLaughlin, Europa Malynicz, Robert May, Michael Nelson, Terry Parsons, Jeff Pellitier, Paul Pietroski, Stefano Predelli, Marga Reimer, Mark Richard, Stephen Schiffer, Roger Schwartzchild, Adam Sennett, Elka Shortsleeve, Ted Sider, Rob Stainton, Dan Stoljar, Matthew Stone, Zoltan Szabó, Ken Taylor, Charles Travis, Brian Weatherston, Sam Wheeler, Tim Williamson, Douglas Winblad, and of course the late Donald Davidson.

We would also like to thank Laurien Berkeley and Sarah Dancy for their help in editing the book, Elka Shortsleeve for indexing it, as well as Jeff Dean for helping us to get the book to press.
Try this on some pure, uncontaminated, students: List a few incontrovertibly context sensitive expressions like ‘I,’ ‘you,’ ‘now,’ and ‘that.’ Then ask them to pick other expressions just like these. They are very good at it. They consistently choose expressions like ‘yesterday,’ ‘those,’ ‘we,’ and they never choose expressions like ‘penguin,’ ‘red,’ ‘know,’ or ‘dance.’ And if you ask them directly whether they think that ‘penguin’ is like the first person personal pronoun ‘I,’ they think you must be joking; when they understand that you’re serious, they invariably answer ‘no.’ Of course, they might be wrong. It might be that the more refined intuitions of seasoned linguists and semanticists reveal that our natural inclinations in these respects are mistaken. But we don’t think so. We think these strong and clear initial classifications are correct and that semanticists who ignore them are led astray.

On the first page of Kaplan’s classic ‘Demonstratives,’ there is a list of expressions he calls indexicals. Slightly elaborated, his list goes like this: The personal pronouns ‘I,’ ‘you,’ ‘he,’ ‘she,’ ‘it’ in their various cases and number (e.g., singular, plural, nominative, accusative, genitive forms), the demonstrative pronouns ‘that’ and ‘this’ in their various cases and number, the adverbs ‘here,’ ‘there,’ ‘now,’ ‘today,’ ‘yesterday,’ ‘tomorrow,’ ‘ago’ (as in ‘He left two days ago’), ‘henceforth’ (as in ‘There will be no talking henceforth’), and the adjectives ‘actual’ and ‘present’ (Kaplan 1989a, p. 489). Words and aspects of words that indicate tense also have their reference so determined. And there are also the contextuals, which include common nouns like ‘enemy,’ ‘outsider,’ ‘foreigner,’ ‘alien,’ ‘immigrant,’ ‘friend,’ and ‘native’ as well as common adjectives like ‘foreign,’ ‘local,’ ‘domestic,’ ‘national,’ ‘imported,’ and ‘exported’ (cf., Vallée 2003; Nunberg 1992; Condoravdi and Gawron 1995; Partee 1989).

1 To be honest, we have our doubts about so-called contextuals; and it’s probably no accident that they did not occur on Kaplan’s (1989) original list. We will let you decide for yourself after you have read our book.
In what follows, we shall refer to this set of expressions both as the Basic Set of Context Sensitive Expressions (the Basic Set, for short) and as the set of genuinely context sensitive expressions.

Why choose those expressions? Why didn’t he put, say, ‘red,’ ‘know,’ ‘duck,’ ‘every,’ ‘good,’ or ‘happy’ in this set? Here’s an interesting fact about Kaplan’s classic paper: He doesn’t give a reason. He never sees the need to elaborate on, or defend, his choice of examples. In the end, he develops a sophisticated theory of the semantics of demonstratives and other context sensitive expressions. But his account presupposes that the domain he is theorizing about is obvious and already identified.

One central goal in this book is to defend the uncontaminated intuitions that underlie Kaplan’s methodology from a wide range of popular objections. In so doing, we also defend a certain view of the role of context sensitivity in the semantics for natural language. It’s simultaneously a defense of a certain conception of semantics and of a conception of semantic content.

This first chapter is intended just as an overview of what’s to come. We don’t really engage in any serious argumentation here; we just quickly present the views we advertised in our subtitle, i.e., Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism; we describe our central opponents (Radical and Moderate Contextualists), the kind of arguments used by our adversaries; and at the end of the chapter we outline the book’s argumentative strategy.

## Introduction to Semantic Minimalism

At this introductory stage, we’ll just list three particularly important features of Semantic Minimalism, all of which will be elaborated on, and defended, later in the book (see in particular Chapter 10):

1. The most salient feature of Semantic Minimalism is that it recognizes few context sensitive expressions, and, hence, acknowledges a very limited effect of the context of utterance on the semantic content of an utterance. The only context sensitive expressions are the very obvious ones listed above plus or minus a bit. These are not only obvious, but they pass certain tests for context sensitivity that we spell out in Chapter 7.
2. It follows that all semantic context sensitivity is grammatically (i.e., syntactically or morphemically) triggered.
3. Beyond fixing the semantic value of these obviously context sensitive expressions, the context of utterance has no effect on the proposition semantically expressed. In this sense, the semantic
content of a sentence $S$ is the proposition that all utterances of $S$
express (when we adjust for or keep stable the semantic values of
the obvious context sensitive expressions in $S$).

Some illustrations: If we keep tense fixed,\textsuperscript{2} any utterance of (1)

(1) Rudolf is a reindeer

is true just in case Rudolf is a reindeer, and expresses the proposition \textit{that Rudolf is a reindeer}.\textsuperscript{3}
Any utterance of (2)

(2) Rudolf has a red nose

is true just in case Rudolf has a red nose, and expresses the proposition \textit{that Rudolf has a red nose}.
Any utterance of (3)

(3) Rudolf is happy

is true just in case Rudolf is happy, and expresses the proposition \textit{that Rudolf is happy}.
Any utterance of (4)

(4) Rudolf has had breakfast

is true just in case Rudolf has had breakfast, and expresses the proposition \textit{that Rudolf has had breakfast}.
Any utterance of (5)

(5) Rudolf doesn’t know that penguins eat fish

is true just in case Rudolf doesn’t know that penguins eat fish, and expresses
the proposition \textit{that Rudolf doesn’t know that penguins eat fish}.

If you find it surprising that someone would write a book defending con-
clusions so obvious, we have a great deal of sympathy. The problem is that
a wide range of our contemporary colleagues rejects these views (see below).
(It’s probably no exaggeration to say that our views about (1)–(5) are

\textsuperscript{2} As we will do throughout this book.

\textsuperscript{3} Semantic Minimalism, as understood in this book, need not take a stand on whether
semantic content is a proposition, or truth conditions, or what have you. Throughout the
book we try to remain neutral by couching the issues both in terms of truth conditions and
in terms of propositions.
currently held only by a small minority of philosophers and linguists, at least among those who have thought about the surrounding issues.) This book is our attempt to rebut these influential objections. A great deal of that defense focuses on the relationship between speech act content and semantic content, and in that respect Speech Act Pluralism plays a central role.

**Introduction to Speech Act Pluralism**

Here’s one way to summarize Speech Act Pluralism (for fuller presentation see Chapter 13):

No one thing is said (or asserted, or claimed, or . . .) by any utterance: rather, indefinitely many propositions are said, asserted, claimed, stated. What is said (asserted, claimed, etc.) depends on a wide range of facts other than the proposition semantically expressed. It depends on a potentially indefinite number of features of the context of utterance and of the context of those who report on (or think about) what was said by the utterance.

It follows from Speech Act Pluralism that an utterance can assert propositions that are not even logical implications of the proposition semantically expressed. Nothing even prevents an utterance from asserting (saying, claiming, etc.) propositions incompatible with the proposition semantically expressed by that utterance. From this, it further follows that if you want to exploit intuitions about speech act content to fix semantic content, then you have to be extremely careful in so doing. It can be done, and we’ll show you how, but it’s a subtle and easily corrupted process.

These points are connected to our defense of Semantic Minimalism because one underlying assumption in many anti-minimalist arguments (in particular, what we shall call the Context Shifting Arguments) is the idea that semantic content has to be closely connected to speech act content. If Speech Act Pluralism is correct, then there is no such tight connection, and so, this requirement is revealed to be a philosophical prejudice. Another way to see the connection is this: If there really were (or had to be) a close connection between speech act content and semantic content, then all the data we think support Speech Act Pluralism would also serve to undermine Semantic Minimalism. That’s how some of the most clearheaded contextualists argue. Our strategy is to endorse the data they invoke, but undermine their assumption that this data has semantic implications.

At this initial stage it’s worth highlighting one more aspect of Speech Act Pluralism that both has wide ranging implications and sets our view apart from (all?) other contemporary accounts of context sensitivity. We
don’t think that everything a speaker says by uttering a sentence in a context C is determined by features of C. The speaker’s intentions, facts about the audience, the place and time of utterance, background knowledge that’s salient in C, the previous conversations salient in C, etc., are insufficient to fix what the speaker said. According to Speech Act Pluralism, a theory of speech act content has to take into account the context of those who say or think about what the speaker said, i.e., the context of those who report what’s said by the utterance can, in part, determine what was said by that utterance. (As far as we can tell, we are on our own in defending this view; we published a paper defending it in 1997 and don’t know of anyone else who has endorsed it yet.)

Opponents of Semantic Minimalism

As we have already mentioned, a wide range of semantic theorists can advocate Semantic Minimalism. Indeed, those who practice semantics accepting these kinds of constraints tend to fight fierce internal battles. This book is not a contribution to such rivalries. It’s about a range of arguments (below we call them Context Shifting Arguments and Incompleteness Arguments) which, if sound, would undermine the possibility of semantic theorizing. Not all of those who employ these arguments realize the logical implications of doing so. Indeed, one of the points we’ll emphasize below is that most proponents of these arguments operate under the illusion they can be a part of ‘business as usual’ semantics. They don’t recognize the dangers lurking right around the corner as soon as they start down this path.

The two central opponents of Semantic Minimalism we’ll be concerned with we will call Radical and Moderate Contextualists. What they have in common is that their positions are based on similar kinds of arguments. We now outline these positions, and then, the kinds of arguments used by their proponents.

Central Opponent 1: Radical Contextualism (RC)

We want to engage two traditions according to which Semantic Minimalism is fundamentally mistaken. One of these goes back to the Wittgenstein of the Philosophical Investigations, on through Austin, and is today represented by a wide range of philosophers, some of whom call themselves Relevance Theorists, some neo-Wittgensteinians, some Sellarsians. We call them all Radical Contextualists. These theorists all hold some version or other of the

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view that *every* single expression is context sensitive,\(^5\) and that the peculiarities of members of the Basic Set are of no deep theoretical significance. Slightly more precisely, they adhere to some version of (RC1)-(RC3):

(RC1) No English sentence S ever semantically expresses a proposition. Any semantic value that Semantic Minimalists assign to S can be no more than a *propositional fragment* (or *radical*), where the hallmark of a propositional fragment (or radical) is that it does not determine a set of truth conditions, and hence, cannot take a truth value.

(RC2) Context sensitivity is ubiquitous in this sense: No expansion of what we are calling the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions can salvage Semantic Minimalism, i.e., however the Basic Set is expanded, the output will never be more than a propositional fragment; something, therefore, not even truth evaluable.

(RC3) Only an utterance can semantically express a complete proposition, have a truth condition, and so, take a truth value.

Though they are not alone, John Searle and Charles Travis – without acknowledging each other often (if at all) – are and have been for over thirty years the chief spokespersons for RC.

\[\ldots\] the notion of literal meaning of a sentence only has application relative to a set of background assumptions, and furthermore, these background assumptions are not and could not all be realized in the semantic structure of the sentence in the way that presuppositions and indexically dependent elements of the sentence’s truth conditions are realized in the semantic structure of the sentence. (Searle 1978, p. 210)

What words mean plays a role in fixing when they would be true; but not an exhaustive one. Meaning leaves room for variation in truth conditions from one speaking to another. (Travis 1996, p. 451)

\[\ldots\] in general the meaning of a sentence only has application (it only, for example, determines a set of truth conditions) against a background of assumptions and practices that are not representable as a part of meaning. (Searle 1980, p. 221)

Both of these philosophers allude to Wittgenstein and Austin as their chief influences (Travis 1985, p. 187; 1996, p. 451; Searle 1980, p. 229).

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\(^5\) There are different ways of characterizing their views: For example, Every sentence is context sensitive. Or, if the only context sensitivity you take into account is that due to the expressions in the Basic Set, you won’t get a proposition or anything truth evaluable.
There is a sense in which we have a great deal of respect for RC. RC, we'll argue, is the logical consequence of denying Semantic Minimalism. As far as we can tell, philosophers and linguists who try to modify Semantic Minimalism only along the edges, by adding a bit of context sensitivity here and there, fail to see that by so doing they lead themselves directly into the clutches of RC.

**Central Opponent 2: Moderate Contextualism (MC)**

The other opponents of Semantic Minimalism we are calling Moderate Contextualists. Moderate Contextualists try to steer a middle course between Semantic Minimalism and Radical Contextualism by minimally expanding the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions. Slightly more precisely, Moderate Contextualists endorse some version of (MC1)–(MC3):

- **(MC1)** The expressions in the Basic Set do not exhaust all the sources of semantic context sensitivity.
- **(MC2)** Many sentences that Semantic Minimalism assigns truth conditions to, and treats as semantically expressing a proposition, fail to have truth conditions or to semantically express a proposition; they express only fragmentary propositions. Such linguistic expressions are described as providing ‘incomplete logical forms,’ ‘semantic skeletons,’ ‘semantic scaffolding,’ ‘semantic templates,’ ‘propositional schemas’ (see, e.g., Carston 2002; Sperber and Wilson 1986; Recanati 1993, 2004; Bach 1994a; Taylor 2001). All of these locutions entail that the expression is not fully propositional; it is incomplete qua semantic entity; it is not truth evaluable.
- **(MC3)** For the cases in question, only their utterances semantically express a proposition, and have (interpretive) truth conditions, and so, take a truth value.

Moderate Contextualists don’t typically see themselves as belonging to a tradition or a group and they wouldn’t classify themselves as Moderate Contextualists. There are two kinds of Moderate Contextualists: *Misguided Semanticists* and *Semantic Opportunists*.

The Misguided Semanticists come to MC by noticing some data or evidence they think has to be accounted for by a semantic theory (we will describe data of this kind below). They don’t see how to account for it except by expanding the Basic Set.

The Semantic Opportunists are sneakier. They are philosophers who come to semantics *with* a nonsemantic agenda. They might be concerned with defending a view in epistemology, ethics, philosophical logic, philos-
ophy of mind, metaphysics, etc. They have no interest in, or understanding of, the overall semantic project. They postulate that various expressions are context sensitive because doing so lends support to a view, usually radical, they endorse in their respective area.

Paradigm examples are ethicists who claim that ethical terms are context sensitive; epistemologists who claim that certain epistemic terms are context sensitive; metaphysicians who claim that vague terms are context sensitive; philosophical logicians who claim that quantifiers or certain semantic terms are context sensitive, and so on.

For our purposes, what motivates Moderate Contextualists doesn’t really matter. What does matter is how MC is implemented. Here’s what we have in mind: Let’s assume, for the sake of argument, that Moderate Contextualists hold that some expression \( e \), not in the Basic Set, is context sensitive. Remember, they do not think, as Radical Contextualists do, that semantics is impossible. They therefore face a range of additional questions about how a semantic theory should accommodate this additional context sensitivity.

If you have evidence that \( e \) is context sensitive and you want that incorporated into a semantic theory, primarily three basic strategies are available to you: the Surprise Indexical Strategy, the Hidden Indexical Strategy, and the Unarticulated Constituent Strategy. Here, in very brief outline, is each option.

**The Surprise Indexical Strategy**

The Surprise Indexical Strategy is the most straightforward of the three. If you opine that an expression \( e \) is context sensitive, then add \( e \) to the Basic Set, thereby treating it as an indexical, in the exact same way that ‘I’ and ‘that’ are indexicals. So, some epistemologists, e.g., Lewis, DeRose, or Cohen, think that knowledge attributions exhibit context sensitivity. This leads them to treat the verb ‘to know’ as context sensitive. One way to incorporate this contextualist view into semantics is to treat ‘know’ as an indexical expression in a straightforward manner: The semantic value of ‘know’ changes from one context of utterance to another. As a result, what’s required for satisfying, say, ‘Lewis knows that penguins eat fish’ varies from one context of utterance to another, contingent, say, on rising or falling epistemic standards. Commitment to epistemological contextualism in this manner thereby commits one to extending the Basic Set to include ‘know’ in addition to ‘I,’ ‘here,’ etc.

**The Hidden Indexical Strategy**

The Hidden Indexical Strategy postulates a phonetically unrealized component (a covert indexical) at some level of linguistic representation, say, in
Logical Form. Rather than treating a surface (overt) expression \( e \) itself as an indexical (as the Surprise Indexical Strategy does), the Hidden Indexical Strategy accounts for alleged context sensitivity by finding (or postulating) a ‘hidden’ (i.e., unpronounced or covert) indexical associated with the expression(s) we hear pronounced. For example, most philosophers and linguists think that sentences with comparative adjectives are context sensitive. They hold that when someone utters, for example, ‘Bill is short,’ there’s an unpronounced indexical associated with ‘short’ that makes reference to a comparison class. For any utterance of this sentence, you don’t hear ‘for an F’ or anything like it; rather, what you hear is just ‘short.’ But in the underlying logical–syntactic form of the sentence, there’s alleged to be a (covert) lexical item that refers in context to a comparison class. Again, there are many ways to achieve this end formally, but the basic idea is to take the logical form of ‘Bill is short’ to be something along the lines of ‘Bill is short for an F,’ where ‘F’ can vary from one context of utterance to another.

The Unarticulated Constituent Strategy

The Unarticulated Constituent Strategy finds context sensitivity in certain sentences, but does not recommend treating any pronounced or unpronounced component of that sentence as the source of this context sensitivity. According to this view, a propositional component gets added without being triggered by a syntactic component (pronounced or unpronounced) in the uttered sentence. For example, consider the sentence ‘It’s raining.’ Perry (1986) claims that unless the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance of this sentence included a location, it would not be ‘complete,’ and so, would not be truth evaluable. However, there’s no expression in the logical–syntactic form of this sentence that makes reference to a location. Instead, the location is somehow or other added to the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance of the sentence without its being required by any lexical item in the sentence.

Methodological observation: MC and RC are supported by only two kinds of arguments

Here’s a methodological observation that underlies the entire rest of this book:

\[6 \text{ ‘An indexical is like a free variable needing to be assigned a value. . . . the conceptual gaps in utterances of semantically underdeterminate sentences do not correspond to anything in the sentences themselves . . . Not being sentence constituents, they enter in not at the linguistic level but at the conceptual level . . . ’} \text{(Bach 1994a, p. 133).} \]
Methodological observation. There are two basic kinds of argument adduced in favor of all versions of RC and MC: Context Shifting Arguments and Incompleteness Arguments.

These two kinds of argument are the central motivation behind all departures from Semantic Minimalism.

This observation about the literature on (semantic) context sensitivity is meant to be substantial and controversial. If we are right, then a wide range of apparently diverse philosophical positions rely solely upon two kinds of argument. Chapter 2 is devoted to presenting textual evidence in support of this claim. Here we give a rather brief introduction to what we mean by Context Shifting Arguments (CSA) and Incompleteness Arguments.

Context Shifting Arguments (and a preview of how they are misused)

Someone in the business of investigating context sensitivity contemplates and imagines language as used in contexts other than the one she happens to find herself in. She is, after all, interested in the way in which content is influenced by variation in the context of utterance; in particular, she tries to elicit intuitions about whether what is said, or expressed by, or the truth conditions of, an utterance varies in some systematic way with contexts of utterance. To do so, she imagines a range of utterances, $u_1$–$u_n$, of a sentence S. The resulting data consists of her reports of, and the audience’s own, intuitions about the content of $u_1$–$u_n$. Arguments that appeal to this kind of evidence we call Context Shifting Arguments.

Here’s a preview of what we’ll argue later: The literature on context sensitivity is plagued by a blatant misuse of this kind of argument. The mistake is not simply of the kind Grice pointed out, i.e., that theorists have to distinguish between intuitions about what utterances say and what they implicate. The way we see it, that mistake is superficial and relatively easy to avoid. Rather, the fundamental mistake in the entire contextualist literature is this: To properly engage in this sort of thought experiment a theorist has to locate herself in a particular context. To not make the context of the thought experiment an essential variable of the experiment is like trying to measure the speed of objects around you while ignoring your own speed. You can’t do it. This mistake, we argue, is exactly the one that both Radical and Moderate Contextualists are guilty of.

If our metaphorical presentation of the problem seems obscure, bear with us until Chapters 7–9, where full details and clarification will be provided.