LINGUISTIC MEANING AND THE MINIMALISM CONTEXTUALISM DEBATE

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1. *Context and Contexts*

1.1. *Minimalism and Contextualism: The main features*

Definitions concerning *Minimalism* and *Contextualism* vary and we find different articulations of the two positions (e.g. Carston, 2002 & 2008; Recanati, 2004 & 2005; Borg, 2004a & 2007; Cappelen & Lepore, 2005). It is therefore difficult to provide a general description of either of the two approaches on the basis of which we can classify any theoretical proposal regarding the concepts of *meaning*, *saying* and *context* in a widely acceptable manner. Roughly speaking, the debate deals with the question whether context plays any role in determining the *truth-conditions*, and if it does, in what way an eventual context-influence on truth-conditions takes place. The following fairly general characterisation of Minimalism and Contextualism reflects the debate from this point of view and makes some of its implications transparent.

> *Minimalism*
> First, Minimalism takes the *influence of context* upon *what is said*, i.e. the truth-evaluable, propositional or semantic content of an uttered sentence to be *minimal* (Cappelen & Lepore, 2005, pp. 143–154). Only a small number of expressions call for contextual information in order to guarantee truth-evaluability (Borg, 2004b).
> Second, Minimalism takes any influence of the context to be *linguistically controlled* or *syntactically triggered*. Hence, the *linguistic meaning* of a sentence sufficiently determines its *truth-conditions* (Borg, 2004a, pp. 147–158). What is said by an uttered sentence departs only minimally from the linguistic meaning of the sentence (Recanati, 2005, p. 175).
> Third, *communication* and *pragmatics* are taken to have little impact upon what is said (e.g. Cappelen & Lepore, 2005, pp. 143–154; Bach, 1994).

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Contextualism

First, Contextualism takes the *influence of the context* upon *what is said* to be much *bigger* than traditionally *assumed.* The number of context-sensitive expressions varies and the contextualists' criticism can be seen as an *existential* (Recanati, 2004) or a *universal claim* (e.g. Travis, 1985, 1996 & 1997; Bezuidenhout, 2002).

Second, following Contextualism, context-influence is *not necessarily* linguistically controlled and needn't be syntactically triggered (Recanati, 2002). A simple equation of linguistic meaning with truth-conditions is therefore not always or even never possible (depending on whether Contextualism is interpreted existentially or universally). Consequently, truth-conditions relate partially or even entirely to *utterances* (e.g. Carston, 2002, p. 28).

Third, communication and pragmatics are taken to have a great or even essential impact upon what is said (e.g. Sperber & Wilson, 1986). The accurate reading depends again on the type of Contextualism put forward.

These characteristics of Minimalism and Contextualism show that even when the influence of context is not limited to the so called *basic set* of expressions (Cappelen & Lepore, 2005, pp. 1–2) such as "I", "you", "today" etc., this does not necessarily mean that a genuine contextualist position is put forward (even though it may be motivated by some of its insights). In addition, we must consider *in what way* the context-influence takes place and if it is modelled *syntactically*, *semantically* or *pragmatically* (Zeman, 2007, pp. 548–550 & p. 553).

Minimalism or positions faithful to its insights typically models context-influence either syntactically or semantically. In the first case, it locally adapts the *logical form* of individual words in a sentence in order to account for an eventual context-influence (Borg, 2004a; Stanley, 2000 & 2002). The resulting theory is sometimes called *Indexicalism*. The second approach has become very popular in recent years and adapts a Kaplan-Perry-framework (Kaplan, 1989; Barwise & Perry, 1983) for indexicals and demonstratives in order to handle other forms of context-sensitivity. The context-influence is semantically modelled by introducing different *standards* (*circumstances of evaluation*; *context of assessment*). They operate globally upon an uttered sentence's content in order to determine its truth-value. The resulting theories represent either some form of *Relativism* (Kölbel, 2002 & Recanati, 2007) or *Non-Indexical Contextualism* (Predelli, 2005; MacFarlane, 2005 & 2007; Korta & Perry, 2007; Corazza & Dokic, 2007). These approaches certainly interpret context-influence in a much broader sense. This fact links them to Contextualism. At the same time the positions just mentioned take

context-influence to be systematic. This makes them minimalistic in their spirit. Now, if these standards are established only by and within the context of communication and taken to be essentially pragmatic, we get a genuine form of Contextualism (Recanati, 2007, p. 174).

Despite these nuances, we may nevertheless take the general maxim on board that Minimalism tends to hold context-influence as small as possible. It assumes an eventual context-influence to be linguistically controlled, allowing therefore to construe a close relationship between *linguistic meaning* or simply *meaning* and *truth-conditions*.[1] In contrast, Contextualism takes context-influence to be much bigger and not necessarily governed by linguistic means.

1.2. *Minimalism, Contextualism and Linguistic Meaning*

The following portrayal of the debate will mainly focus on Contextualism interpreted as a universal claim and neglect, at least intermediately, the question concerning the relationship between meaning and communication. The first choice is motivated by the fact that only a universal interpretation of the contextualists' claim poses a real challenge for Minimalism. If we interpret Contextualism as an existential claim, we leave open the possibility of providing specific solutions for eventual problematic expressions or sentences. In addition, the universal reading allows avoiding the very troubling question whether semantically interpreted truth-conditions really are on par with pragmatically interpreted ones. According to universal Contextualism, a semantic interpretation of truth-conditions is simply not available. Truth-conditions are an entirely pragmatic issue, related not so much to *sentences* but to *utterances* (e.g. Recanati, 1989).

The second choice concerning the connection between meaning and communication and its preliminary suspension has to do with the problem that the debate otherwise loses its drive. Minimalists and contextualists tend to view the matter in principle differently. Even though most contextualists assume a very strong conceptual link between meaning and communication and take it to be the starting point of their investigations, their main worries can be made transparent without making any initial assumptions concerning the relationship between the two concepts.

Minimalism and Contextualism both operate with the concept *linguistic meaning* and believe some kind of stable linguistic or semantic input to be indispensable. Of course, we find different labels for the concept and some

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[1] Kent Bach (2006: p. 435) calls his position *Radical Semantic Minimalism*. He rejects the assumption that the linguistic meaning of a sentence can be identified with its truth-conditions. His Minimalism is motivated by the assumption that communication has no influence upon meaning, see point 3.

prefer talking of the *conventional meaning* (e.g. Bach, 1994, p. 127), others of *standing meaning* (Heck, 2001, p. 6) or *linguistic conventions* or *rules* (e.g. Recanati, 2005, p. 174). Still others use the term *linguistically encoded meaning* (Carston, 2008, p. 322), *character* (Kaplan, 1989, p. 505) or even *logical form* (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, p. 193) etc. instead. In all of these cases, the name functions as a common denominator for some kind of *linguistic input*, whatever minimal or grand it may be.[2]

Minimalism and Contextualism assess the role of this linguistic input differently. While Minimalism believes it to be sufficient for determining the truth-conditions, Contextualism holds it to be too weak in this regard. Referring to information originating from context appears necessary in order to overcome the weakness of linguistic meaning. The thesis that meaning implies communication can be seen as a *consequence* of another, much deeper lying problem; namely the worry that linguistic meaning is ineffective when it comes to determine truth-conditions of an uttered sentence. Contextualism then combines the diagnosis with the thesis that only the pragmatic context can provide the necessary information for determining the truth-value of the sentence uttered. However, these two claims, namely, that the linguistic meaning is semantically weak and that the context plays a genuine pragmatic role, can and must be defended separately.

In what follows, I would like to focus on the role linguistic meaning plays according to Contextualism. The question I want to ask is if it actually makes sense to interpret context in the very comprehensive way Contextualism suggests. The investigation will show that the assumptions concerning context cannot be defended as any talk of linguistic meaning becomes obnoxious and the project of building a systematic theory of language unintelligible. Before arguing for this point in more detail, I will discuss some problematic sentences used by Contextualism. They allegedly show that context plays a constitutive role in determining truth-conditions.

2. *Sentences falling short of truth-conditions*

2.1. *Syntactically well-formed sentences without semantic content*

The whole debate between Minimalism and Contextualism originally set off with the discussion of sentences of the following sort:[3]

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[2] There are, however, forms of Contextualism, namely the so-called *Eliminativism*, who denies that semantic input really takes place. (Recanati, 2005, pp. 183–185). I will come back to this position at the end of the paper.

[3] Meaning here and elsewhere of course the *uttered* sentence.

(1) Jane is ready.
(2) Peter is tall.

The two sentences (1) and (2) are both *syntactically well-formed*. But without providing further information *what* Jane is ready *for* or indicating the *relevant class of comparison* with regard to which Peter's height must be evaluated, the two sentences cannot be said to be either true or false. Hence, they are *semantically underdeterminate*.

The problem has nothing to do with classical forms of underdetermination requiring further contextual information, as the relevant references are taken to be given and neither sentence is ambiguous. The meaning of the expressions "ready" and "tall" rather is too unspecific and does not make a full contribution to the truth-conditions of the two sentences. Yet, one would expect them to do so, as sentences (1) and (2) are syntactically well-formed. They both seem to violate the principle that sentence meaning is sufficient for determining the truth-conditions. From this, contextualists conclude that context must play a much grander role than traditionally assumed: It must help to overcome the incompleteness of sentence (1) and provide the missing class of comparison for sentence (2).

Of course, it is worth repeating that holding these sentences to be problematic does not commit one to a contextualist's position. Different analyses and locally effective solutions may be provided on either a syntactic or semantic level, as mentioned above. According to Contextualism, however, these attempts are bogus as the problem of semantic underdetermination is universal and patchwork solutions are necessarily vain.

2.2. *Right and wrong truth-conditions*

In order to corroborate their worries, contextualists introduce examples as the following ones:

(3) I have nothing to wear.
(4) Paul had breakfast.

With regard to sentences (3) and (4), we may initially suppose that the sentence meaning is sufficient for determining the truth-conditions. (3) is true if the speaker has nothing to wear, while (4) is true if the person referred to by the name "Paul" had breakfast. The linguistically anchored content will be in most cases trivially false for (3) and trivially true for (4), as most people have something to wear or had breakfast at one point in their lifetime. Now, someone uttering these two sentences will in general mean something more specific, for example that she has nothing *suitable* to wear *for an interview*

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or that Paul had breakfast *that very morning*. Hereupon Contextualism concludes that sentence meaning very often provides *wrong* truth-conditions and it is only with the help pragmatic information that we can specify the proper truth-conditions, often called the *intuitive truth-conditions* (e.g. Recanati, 2001, p. 79) or the *intuitive proposition* expressed (Carston, 2008, p. 323).

One may argue that at this point the question concerning communication and its contribution to truth-conditions becomes vital as the relevant truth-conditions can only be evaluated with respect to the communicative setting. We will see, however, that we can circumvent the question concerning the conceptual link between meaning and communication by interpreting these examples differently. We simply focus on the role of linguistic meaning and consider its particular contribution to what is said by an uttered sentence.

2.3. *Pragmatic truth-conditions*

   (5) The kettle is black.
   (6) The ball is round.

According to Contextualism, the predicate "black" allows for different usage. One may refer to a kettle being painted black on the inside, on the outside or all over. A kettle may be made out of black enamel, covered with black soot, because it was used above the open fire etc. The word "black" does not say in what way the property of blackness is exemplified. Just as with any other colour term, the meaning of the predicate is unspecific in this regard. It provides only a blurred view, so to say, of the object and the property in question. According to contextualists, this then makes it necessary to refer to additional information, specifying *in what way* the colour must be instantiated. Because a kettle covered with black soot may not count as genuinely black and (5), if uttered, would therefore be considered to be false. Hence, the additional information seems indispensable for evaluating (5) as either true or false following Contextualism.

The same holds for example (6): The linguistic meaning of "round" provides only some fairly general information concerning the property of being round, leaving it open, if the word refers to an oval formed ball, an elliptical or a circular one. Yet, the question how the property must be instantiated requires an answer for proceeding to truth-evaluation, as an oval formed ball might not be truly called round, but only a circular one. According to Contextualism, the more specific information concerning the form of the ball is not provided by the linguistic meaning and thus originates from elsewhere.

The two examples (5) and (6) slightly differ from each other. In the first case, contextual information is needed for indicating to what type of surface or what kind of material the predicate "black" must refer to in order to be

truly black. However, example (6) distinguishes different forms of being round. Yet, we may simply switch the two scenarios and claim that the colour-predicate moreover fails to indicate the precise tone the property must have: Must it be pitch-black or more greyish etc.? Again only context could provide these further details which underlines the very extensive role context plays for truth-evaluation. I leave it to the reader to come up with another scenario for (6).

2.4. *Contextualism going radical*

At this point the semantic-underdeterminacy-thesis can be generalised and appears to be a very radical claim: The linguistic meaning of a word is *in principle* too unspecific. It only provides a very general instruction how to apply a word. This unspecificity is considered to be an intrinsic trait of linguistic meaning, necessary for coping with the broad variety of possible usages, as we have seen them in the discussion of the examples. Further information is therefore indispensable for determining the truth-value of an uttered sentence. This additional information forms part and parcel of the truth-conditions and can only be provided by pragmatics; truth-conditions are therefore pragmatically infected — according to contextualists, at least.

Against the background of this reconstruction, the differences between the three sets of examples diminish at once. The problem highlighted by the examples appears to be one and the same for all cases (see Recanati, 2005, 179f.). They now can be seen as manifesting all the same type of semantic underdetermination we have diagnosed with regard to "black" and "round": The meaning of all predicates such as "to have nothing to wear", "to have breakfast", "ready" and "tall" only gives a general instruction in what case the words may be applied; too general in order to be effective with regard to truth-conditions.

In order to illustrate the contextualists' point, we may consider the following analogy: Contextualism assumes that the same variability and unspecificity which we typically find with regard to generic terms such as "colour" or "shape" also holds with their specific correlates like "black" and "round". While the generic terms leave it open whether the object in question is black or blue, round or square, the specific terms leave it open if the object is black on the inside or on the outside, if it is formed more circular or more oval etc. (Travis, 1996, p. 456). If we consider the very heterogeneous roles context must play with regard to the predicates mentioned in these examples, it seems very plausible that context-influence cannot be systematically captured and any syntactical or semantic solution risks to fail. Of course, one would have to argue for this point separately. Yet, if Contextualism is identified with this last assumption, the very possibility of interpreting the
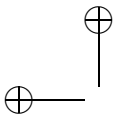
truth-predicate semantically vanishes. Instead, "true" and "false" turn out to be essential properties of utterances and not of sentences.

Hence, the real bone of contention between Minimalism and Contextualism is the power of linguistic meaning. Referring to contextual information such as the communicatively established standards becomes necessary because of the alleged weakness of linguistic meaning. By this Contextualism challenges a long-standing picture of the way reference-fixing and describing work: Traditionally, word-meaning was taken to be an effective means to determine the extension of a word, thereby contributing to the referential or truth-evaluable content of an uttered sentence. The examples (1) to (6) seem to prove this thesis wrong. They show that linguistic meaning only gives some general instructions how to apply a word, leaving yet important details open. Contextualists' criticism thus concerns the overall picture of semantics defended by Minimalism, which erroneously holds linguistic meaning to be more powerful than it actually is.

3. *Contextualism, linguistic meaning and truth-conditions*

Minimalism and Contextualism both assume linguistic meaning to play a constitutive role for determining the truth-conditions of an uttered sentence. While Minimalism identifies meaning with truth-conditions, Contextualism criticises such an equation by arguing that meaning is simply too general and unspecific in order to do so. This makes it necessary to refer to context, playing a constitutive role for determining the truth-conditions. Contextualism thus interpreted does not operate with truth-conditions of different types, namely semantic truth-conditions and pragmatic truth-conditions. Any such duplication is avoided and the question concerning eventual equivocation prevented, because of the universal influence context is taken to have upon truth-conditions. Second, even though most contextualists do refer to communication and suggest that it is only within and by communication that the additional information is specified, this assumption appears to be a mere consequence of the weakness of linguistic meaning: Pragmatics only comes in where semantics turns out to be insufficient.

But if linguistic meaning does not make a full contribution to the truth-conditions of a sentence, what kind of share does it make and are the contextualists' criticisms really warranted? Before tackling these questions, we shall discuss some of the consequences following from the above sketched picture for the relationship between the linguistic content of a sentence and the content of an utterance.
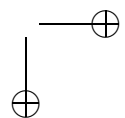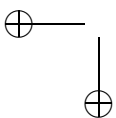
3.1. *Being black without being truly black*

According to the above sketched Contextualism, the following scenario may hold with regard to sentence (5): Two people, S1 and S2 are referring to an originally red kettle all covered with black soot. They both have to judge the following sentence as either true or false:

(5) The kettle is black.

According to S1, the kettle can be said to be black, as she does not care in what way the property of blackness is instantiated. In contrast, S2 is looking for a kettle, which is black in its original state. She therefore judges the utterance of sentence (5) to be false, as the kettle they are talking about used to be red. Their respective judgements can be made explicit as follows:

For S1: The utterance of "The kettle is black" expresses the content that the kettle is covered with black soot. She judges (5) to be true.
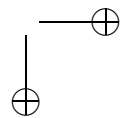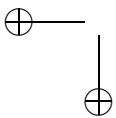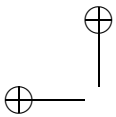
For S2: The utterance of "The kettle is black" expresses the content that the kettle is originally painted in black. She judges (5) to be false.

The opposite truth-values can be traced back to the fact that S1 and S2 have different interests. When we make these explicit, we see that sentence (5) expresses different contents for the two. The respective interests are a constitutive part of the expressed content and they explain, why the utterance's content *systematically* deviates from the sentence-meaning. Grasping the sentence-meaning is certainly an important step for the correct understanding, but with it we are only half way through. In addition, we must consider the interests allowing to specify in what way the property of blackness must be given. Relative to these interests and thus relative to the more explicit content the truth-evaluation of (5) takes place, leading to opposite evaluations of sentence (5) by S1 and S2.

From the fact that S2 holds (5) to be false, we can *logically* follow that she believes the kettle to be not black. She therefore would judge the following sentence to be true:

(7) The kettle is not black.

Of course, the content expressed by (7) must again be understood as follows:

 For S2: The utterance of "The kettle is not black" expresses the content
          that the kettle is not originally painted in black. She judges (7)
          to be true.

The negation operates not simply on the predicate "black" but on the more
explicit content. Therefore, sentence (5) and sentence (7) only seemingly
contradict each other. The contradiction holds only with regard to the word-
ing of the sentences (5) and (7). This masks however the actual content
expressed by (5) and (7) for S1 and S2 respectively. These contents do not
contradict each other.

   Because of her interests and our knowledge that the kettle used to be origi-
nally red, we can further assume that S2 would judge the following sentence
to be true:

   (8) The kettle is red.

Again, we must not conclude that S1 and S2 entertain incompatible believes
by holding, on the one hand, the kettle to be black, and on the other, the
kettle to be red. The wording of sentences (5) and (8) again hides the actual
content expressed by the two sentences for S1 and S2, including information
about their interests. If we make these explicit and add them to the content
expressed, the contradiction simply disappears. For S2 and (8), the actual
content is as follows.

 For S2: The utterance of "The kettle is red" expresses the content that
          the kettle is originally painted in red. She judges (8) to be true.

Utterance content has clear priority over linguistically determined content
for Contextualism. This very fact makes apparent logical contradictions and
epistemic incompatibilities disappear. Ultimately, the correct reading of an
uttered sentence can only be given relative to a context. Any type of linguis-
tic meaning must be interpreted relative to a context and the varying truth-
conditions are to be explained by the varying contexts. However, in all these
cases the linguistic input, i.e. the meaning, remains the same. Yet, given the
priority of utterance content over linguistic content, we must ask what lin-
guistic meaning contributes to the overall picture Contextualism presents of
the relationship between sentence meaning and utterance content. For exam-
ple, what does the linguistic meaning of "black" detached from any context
consist in, given the overwhelming role of context?

3.2. *The puzzle about linguistic meaning*

We may assume that the linguistic meaning is some kind of abstraction of different usages of the word "black" by which one tries to grasp some general and stable content underlying the different applications of the expression. Of course, the general idea of blackness is not very informative (Travis, 1997, p. 93), but the stability claimed for the linguistic meaning of an expression certainly contrasts with the overall context-sensitivity-thesis.

Now, because the linguistic meaning has to be necessarily interpreted relative to some context, it becomes difficult to say what it consists in. Any explanation will be contextualized. Consequently, Contextualism cannot provide any criteria for identifying the linguistic meaning. This makes it questionable, if it can assume the concept of linguistic meaning at all. The overall framework Contextualism suggests makes it difficult to make any positive claim about linguistic meaning. The more one accentuates the role of context, the less one is in the position to argue for a stable linguistic input.

3.2.1. *Linguistic meaning and contextualism's collapse*

The systematic consequences of this criticism are quite considerable, as any Contextualism thereby risks collapsing into *Eliminativism*, the most extreme articulation of the contextualists' position: Eliminativism denies linguistic meaning any systematic or explanatory role. This consequence seems to follow necessarily for any genuine Contextualism, which takes context-influence to be solely pragmatic, as the following argument confirms.

We have seen that Contextualism can explain away alleged contradiction and incompatible believes plausibly by making the actual content of an utterance explicit. However, with any logical judgement being contextualized according to the contextualists' thesis, we cannot build up a systematic theory of language and describe even very simple logical relationships holding in it. At first sight it may seem to be possible to defend the validity of the following logical relationship between a specific term (P1) and one of its respective general terms (C1):

  (P1) x is round
  (C1) x has a shape

We cannot, however, conclude from a premise such as (P2) "x is black" to (C2) "x is black":

  (P2) x is black
  (C2) x is black

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The conclusion (C2) is simply a non-sequitur within the contextualists'
framework. Depending on whether we interpret "x is black" as either "paint-
ed originally in black" or "covered with black soot", we may follow from
(P2) either "x is black" or "x is not black". The fact that it is not possible
to construe the above mentioned logical relationship corroborates our reser-
vations that the linguistic meaning of "black" cannot be grasped. If we can
conclude from "x is black" to "x is black" and its contrary, we may further
raise the question what stable linguistic content could support this conclu-
sion.[4] Such a linguistic input need to be very minimal and the only one I
can think of is that "black" means some particular colour, without further
specifying what colour it actually is.

Thus, if we follow the contextualists' recipe, we simply lose the possibil-
ity of specifying the meaning of specific terms at all, as we can only provide
very general information related to the respective generic term and its instan-
tiation. And even this seems doubtful. Actually, we find ourselves caught
on a slippery slope: We may suspect that the very same problem we have
just seen with "black" will turn up again when it comes to specifying the
meaning of the general term "colour". The meaning of the generic term will
have to be contextualized in very different ways, making it again difficult to
specify its stable meaning. This makes it doubtful that the logical relation-
ship between (P3) and (C3) actually holds:

  (P3) x is a colour
  (C3) x is a colour

If no such logical relationship can be construed, we lose the very possibility
of construing a systematic theory of language.

3.2.2. *Contextualisms' dilemma and a diagnosis*

In order to prevent the collapse into Eliminativism, Contextualism must put
forward a substantial claim concerning the linguistic meaning of any linguis-
tic item. However, the more information one associates with the linguistic
meaning allowing to support the conclusions to (C1), (C2) and to (C3), the
less plausible it becomes to assume that meaning is not sufficient for de-
termining the truth-conditions. Consequently, the phenomena described by

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[4] Imhof (2006) draws the same conclusions for John Searle's semantic content (Searle,
1978 & 1980), while MacFarlane's Non-Indexical Contextualism aims at preventing this very
conclusion by taking the meaning of any word to be context-invariant; see MacFarlane (2005,
pp. 202–215 & 2007, pp. 241–244).

Contextualism would then appear to be the simple result of a very commonly entertained practice of elliptical talk in everyday life, possible because of the potent mechanisms of communication, as many Minimalists have already pointed out (Bach, 1997, p. 128 & 2005, p. 26; Borg, 2004, pp. 259–266; Cappelen & Lepore, 2005, pp. 190–208). Since Grice, this is certainly a commonplace (Grice, 1975, pp. 26–31). Such an assumption seems very plausible as the English vocabulary allows distinguishing very different types of being black or being round and we may associate strict standards of application with any of them. Neglecting these subtleties in communication is simply a matter of convenience.

Contextualism seems to be trapped in a genuine dilemma: Either it holds on to the thesis that linguistic meaning is insufficient to determine truth-condition, by which Contextualism has to give up the concept of linguistic meaning altogether, or it puts forward a substantial claim with regard to linguistic meaning, making it doubtful that the thesis of universal or principle semantic underdeterminacy can be defended. This conclusion certainly depends upon Contextualism being interpreted as a universal claim. But as we have already mentioned right at the beginning of this paper, Contextualism loses much of his threatening force if it is interpreted as an existential claim.

It is worth mentioning that Contextualism's portrayal of semantic incompleteness does not correspond with other types of context-sensitivity, familiar from indexicals or demonstratives. According to the traditional picture, meaning either directly leads to the property described or it provides quite distinct information allowing to identify the object delivered by context without further ado. Contextualists, however, seem to assume another type of unspecificity, namely that meaning fails to give important information concerning the object and its properties. Meaning shows us, so to say, only the half way through. All other information is provided by the pragmatic context. This catapults us in some kind of a semantically motivated indeterminacy of reference.

As we have seen, this picture must be, at some point, mistaken, because the interpretation implies clear inconsistencies, making the concept of linguistic meaning obsolete and depriving a theory of language from its basis. Eventually the universally semantic underdeterminacy is nothing more than an equivocation with regard to truth-conditions, as contextualists simply have other requirements. Their concerns are not so much linguistic meaning itself and its effectiveness for determining truth-conditions, but the interplay between language, communication and understanding. Contextualism, as I have mentioned at the very beginning of this paper, clearly focus on the usage of language for communicative purposes. Yet, instead of referring to this phenomenon under the name of truth-conditions, it would be simpler to call them standards of (communicative) adequacy.
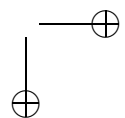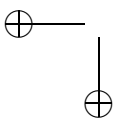
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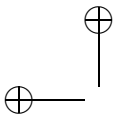
4. *Conclusion*

We may sum up as follow: The thesis of universal semantic underdeterminacy with regard to truth-conditions of uttered sentences highly depends upon the assumption that linguistic meaning is not informative. This deprives Contextualism from providing a substantial account for linguistic meaning, as no criteria of identification can be provided. The question what "black" or any other word means turns out to be unanswerable and simply makes no sense. Contextualism thereby risks collapsing into Eliminativism. In order to avoid this threat, Contextualism has to make more substantial claims with regard to linguistic meaning. This, in turn, makes it doubtful if linguistic meaning is really not capable of determining the truth-conditions of a sentence. All the more as the very project of determining a systematic theory of language depends upon such an assumption. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to indicate any logical implications valid within this theoretical construal.

Yet, some positive conclusions can be drawn from the above mentioned dilemma for linguistic meaning and the question, what it must contribute to sentence meaning, if we do not want to give the concept up altogether. The above dilemma can be considered as some kind of test. It helps to check if in case of an alleged semantic underdeterminacy, the linguistic meaning of a word still contains enough information, so we can give a positive account for it. If not, something must be wrong with the underdeterminacy thesis. We can directly apply this test for the above cited examples: While it is difficult to make sense of words such as "have nothing to wear", "to have breakfast" if we assume the semantic-underdeterminacy thesis to be correct, predicates such as "tall" still give us concrete information concerning the property in question, indicating that the body height must be evaluated. Simply the relevant class of comparison needs to be specified in addition and thus must be provided by context. The predicate "ready" also describes the property concisely, leaving it open, however, what state exactly can be so described. We find different solutions how to cope with these problems and they are to me all attractive and effective. The only thing one must check is if these accounts all operate with a consistent concept of truth-conditions, namely a genuine semantic one. However, I will leave that point open until another day.[5]


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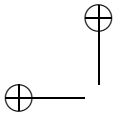
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