Genuine and Indexical Relativism in Truth-Conditional Semantics?

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1 Introduction

In “Zwei Arten von Relativismus”¹, Max Köbel wants to make a substantial distinction between two types of truth-relativism. According to Köbel, indexical relativism detects hidden indexicality in certain statements (e.g. moral judgments). This leads indexical relativists to claim that the proposition expressed by such a statement is relative to a further parameter in the context of use (e.g. a moral code). Indexical relativism, then, denies that the truth-value of these propositions is relative. Genuine relativism, on the other hand, claims that the truth-value of certain propositions (e.g. propositions expressed by moral judgments) is relative to a further parameter in the circumstances of evaluation (e.g. a certain perspective or a code).

In this paper, I want to show that Köbel’s distinction only can be made with regard to certain semantic assumptions. My claim is that if truth-conditional semantics is endorsed, the distinction collapses. The distinction, therefore, is without substance in at least one well-known semantic theory. The question, if it substantial or insubstantial in other semantic theories is not subject to consideration here.

1.1 Structure

Köbel makes his distinction on the basis of the distinction between context of use and circumstances of evaluation, introduced by David Kaplan². This is why

¹Köbel (2004).
²See Kaplan (1989 [1977]).
I will do a considerable amount of work introducing this tool in the first part of this paper.

Then, in a second part, I will try to explain Kölbel’s distinction between indexical and genuine relativism in greater detail.

In the third and main part, I will look at Kölbel’s distinction with regard to truth-conditional semantics to show that it is insubstantial under these assumptions. For my claim I will argue in two ways. First, I will apply Kaplan’s tool introduced in the first part on an intuitive conception of truth-conditional semantics. Second, I will argue for my claim on the basis of how truth-conditional semantics was first introduced by Donald Davidson\(^3\).

## 2 Kaplan’s Two Meanings

In his well-known paper, “Demonstratives”\(^4\), David Kaplan investigates sentences like

“I am hungry” and

“This is my seat.”

He is particularly interested in the contributions to the meaning of a sentence made by words like “I”, “here”, “my” and “this”, words which are usually referred to by “indexicals”. Indexicals are usually characterized as linguistic expressions that depend on the context of use to determine meaning.

Kaplan wants to defend the thesis that indexicals are directly referential.\(^5\) This means that the contribution to the meaning of a sentence in which they occur is not an abstract entity like the Fregean sense, but only the object picked out (or referred to) by the indexical (in collaboration with the context of use) contributes to the meaning.\(^6\)

For my purposes in this paper I am not interested in the views Kaplan is defending in his “Demonstratives”. What I am interested in are the tools he introduces in order to defend his views. These tools are his distinction between character and content of linguistic expressions as well as the distinction between context of use (short: context) and circumstances of evaluation (short: circumstances).

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\(^3\)See Davidson (1984 [1967]).
\(^4\)Kaplan (1989 [1977]).
\(^5\)Cf. p. 492, Kaplan (1989 [1977]).
\(^6\)Cf. p. 483, Kaplan (1989 [1977]).
2.1 Context of Use vs. Circumstances of Evaluation

In order to determine the extension of a sentence (i.e. its truth-value), the context in which the sentence is used and the circumstances in which it is evaluated have to be specified.

For an utterance of a sentence, the context usually contains information about the speaker, time and location of the utterance along with other information. The context determines what is said by the utterance of the sentence, often referred to as intension, proposition or, as Kaplan would say, content. If I utter the sentence “I am hungry” at 1.10pm on January 11th 2011, the context (here specifying me as the speaker and a certain time of utterance) will determine what is said, namely that Jonas Rogger is hungry on January 11th 2011 at 1.10pm.

The circumstances of evaluation determine the truth-value of what is said (the proposition expressed) by a use of sentence. Circumstances usually are taken to be the state of the world in which we evaluate what was said by a sentence. What was said by my utterance of “I am hungry” at 1:10pm on January 11th 2011 is true if the world is such that I actually am hungry at the specified time and false otherwise.

Circumstances of evaluation can also be possible states of the world, not just the actual one. If we want to evaluate the proposition “Jonas Rogger would not be hungry at 1:10pm on January 11th 2011, had he eaten lunch at 12pm on January 11th 2011” we need not consider the actual state of the world but the possible state of the world in which I have eaten lunch at 12pm on January 11th 2011.

In summary, there are two stages in which a sentence gets assigned a truth-value. By specifying the context, the proposition (or content) expressed by the sentence is determined. By specifying the circumstances of evaluation, the truth-value of the expressed proposition is determined.

Kaplan sees that the context of use as well as the circumstances of evaluation are just specific states of the world (or possible states of the world). They both can be expressed by an index $i$ with multiple coordinates, for example like this:

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7 Usually, talk of the truth-value of a sentence is despised. It is said that not sentences, but propositions (or certain uses of a sentence) have truth-values. Even this seem to be not quite right: a proposition only has a truth-value with respect to certain evaluation. Here, when I speak of the truth-value of a sentence, I mean the truth-value assigned to a sentence in a specified context under a specified evaluation. This should not pose any further problems, since, as we will see later, a sentence in a specified context just is a proposition (or a use of a sentence).

8 Cf. p. 508f, Kaplan (1989 [1977]).
Here, “\( w \)” stands for a possible world, “\( t \)” for a point in time, “\( p \)” for a location (a three-dimensional position, so \( p = (x, y, z) \)) and “\( a \)” for an agent. The dots indicate that more coordinates might be in need of specification for determining what is said and the truth-value.

Of course, not all coordinates in \( i \) are equally important. Some coordinates are more important for specifying the context of use while others are more important for specifying the circumstances of evaluation. Some coordinates might even be completely redundant for specifying one or the other. Redundant parts should not bother us.

As there are two stages in which a truth-value is assigned to a sentence, we need two indices to express the two states of the world - one to specify the context and one to specify the circumstances. Let us express this pair of states like this: \( (i_1, i_2) \). Kaplan calls this “double indexing” since there two specified indices are needed - one for each stage.

I have been talking strictly about sentences in this section. Of course, other linguistic expressions (like singular terms, predicates, descriptions, ...) are in need of a specified context in order to have a determinate content and specified circumstances of evaluation in order to have a determinate extension, too. Since in this paper I will only concern myself with full sentences, I will not discuss content and extension of other linguistic expressions in detail here.

### 2.2 Character vs. Content

According to Kaplan, linguistic expression (e.g. a sentence, a term, a predicate and so on) have two kinds of meanings:\footnote{Cf. p. 500, Kaplan (1989 [1977]).} they have a character and they have a content.

The character of an expression determines what is said (the content) by the expression for every context. Itself, the character is independent of context and circumstances of evaluation. Often, characters of expressions are expressed as linguistic conventions or rules like the following for the word “I” in English:

\((R_I)\) The word “I” refers to the speaker of the uttered sentence.

The character together with the context of use determines the content of an expression. The content of a sentence is what is said by the sentence, also referred to by “the thought” of the sentence. Together with the circumstances of evaluation, the content determines the truth-value of a given sentence.
A more frequently used word for content is “proposition”.\textsuperscript{10} For this reason, I will use the expressions “content of” and “proposition expressed by” as interchangeable here.

Again: A sentence has a character, which (together with the context of use) determines the content of the sentence. The content, then, (together with the circumstances of evaluation) determines the truth-value of the sentence. These are the same two stages as mentioned in the previous section. The following diagram pictures this situation:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\node (char) at (0,0) {Character};
\node (ctx) at (3,0) {Context of use};
\node (cont) at (4,0) {Content};
\node (circ) at (4,-1) {circumstances of evaluation};
\node (trueval) at (4,-2) {Truth-value};
\draw[->] (char) -- (ctx);
\draw[->] (ctx) -- (cont);
\draw[->] (cont) -- (circ);
\draw[->] (circ) -- (trueval);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Diagram 1.

2.3 Character and Context as Functions

As the character of an expression specifies the content for a context, it can be expressed as a function from contexts to contents:\textsuperscript{11}

\[ f_s : K \rightarrow C \]

while \textquotedblleft \( f_s \)\textquotedblright\ stands for the function expressing the character of the sentence \( s \), \textquotedblleft \( K \)\textquotedblright\ for the set of contexts and \textquotedblleft \( C \)\textquotedblright\ for the the set of contents. \( K \) will be a subset of the set of indices \( I (K \subseteq I = \{i_1, i_2, i_3, \ldots \}) \) mentioned above.

Something similar holds true for contents. A content can be expressed as a function mapping circumstances of evaluation to truth-values:

\[ g_c : B \rightarrow \{t, f\} \]

while \textquotedblleft \( g_c \)\textquotedblright\ stands for the function expressing the content, \textquotedblleft \( B \)\textquotedblright\ for the set of circumstances and \textquotedblleft \( \{t, f\} \)\textquotedblright\ for the the set of classical truth-values, \textquotedblleft \( t \)\textquotedblright\ for true and \textquotedblleft \( f \)\textquotedblright\ for false. Here also, \( B \) will be a subset of the set of indices \( I (B \subseteq I = \{i_1, i_2, i_3, \ldots \}) \) mentioned above.

\textsuperscript{10}Cf. p. 500, Kaplan (1989 [1977]). Kaplan’s use of “content” might differ slightly from the common use of “proposition”. However, this difference does not have a relevant import on the issues discussed in the paper at hand.

\textsuperscript{11}Cf. e.g. p. 505f, Kaplan (1989 [1977]).
This notation makes obvious the fact that contents can be expressed as the character of a sentence with a given context as argument and truth-values can be expressed as the content with given circumstances as argument. So, for the sentence $s$, (1) and (2) hold true for the right choices of $l$ and $k$.

(1) $f_s(i_l) = g_c$

(2) $g_c(i_k) = t$

Sentences that do not contain indexical expressions have fixed character.\(^\text{12}\) This means that the function expressing the character of such a sentence is constant. In other words, in order to determine the content of a sentence with a fixed character, we don’t have to take into account its context of use. An example of such a sentence might be “Jonas Rogger eats lunch at 12:30pm on January 14th 2011”.\(^\text{13}\)

Also, a fixed content is represented by a constant function from circumstances of evaluation to truth-values.\(^\text{14}\) On the level of sentences, examples for sentences with fixed contents are such that are necessarily true or false. These are independent of circumstances of evaluation, they are true (or false) “in every world”.

3 Kölbel’s Distinction between Genuine and Indexical Relativism

In his paper “Zwei Arten von Relativismus”\(^\text{15}\) (“Two Types of Relativism”), Max Kölbel wants to distinguish two types of relativism substantially: indexical relativism (“indexikalischer Relativismus”, short: $IR$) and genuine relativism (“echter Relativismus”, short: $GR$). He wants to show that there is a fundamental difference between the two and that they each have to face different sets of challenges.\(^\text{16}\)

Both of these types of relativism are types of truth-relativism. They hold positions about how statements get their truth-value, or more precisely, that

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\(^{12}\)Cf. p. 506, Kaplan (1989 [1977]).

\(^{13}\)To me, the existence of sentences that determine a definite content absolutely independent of the context of use is very dubious.

\(^{14}\)Cf. p. 502, Kaplan (1989 [1977]).

\(^{15}\)Kölbel (2004).

\(^{16}\)Cf. p. 492, Kölbel (2004).
the truth-value of statements is relative to certain parameters in the world.\textsuperscript{17}

Because of that, Kölbel is not talking about a difference in the topic or in the scope of the relativisms. He says that this distinction can be applied to any kind of relativism, for example moral relativism and epistemological relativism. His distinction is a sort of meta-distinction. Still, to make his point, he concentrates on the case of moral relativism.\textsuperscript{18}

Kölbel uses Kaplan’s distinction between context of use and circumstances of evaluation to make clear the difference between the two types of relativism.\textsuperscript{19} According to Kölbel, proponents of IR hold that the resulting contents of utterances of certain sentences (e.g. moral judgments) are relative to a parameter in the context of use. The proponents of GR, on the other hand, hold that (also) the truth-value of certain utterances are relative to a parameter in the circumstances of evaluation. In short, IR claims a relativism of statements in the first stage (when the content is determined) while GR claims it in the second stage (when the truth-value is determined).

### 3.1 Indexical Relativism (IR)

IR sees a non-explicit indexicality hidden in moral judgments. Kölbel distinguishes two kinds of indexical relativism, the simple indexical relativism (short: SIR) and the more sophisticated Harman-Dreier indexical relativism (short: HIR).

According to SIR, someone asserts the same thing if she utters the sentence $s$ or if she utters the sentence $s^*$.\textsuperscript{20}

$s_1$ : "Urs should not eat meat."

$s_1^*$ : "My moral code requires that Urs does not eat meat."

Two sentences are propositionally equivalent if and only if in every context of use someone asserts the same propositions, no matter which one of the sentences she uses. According to Kölbel, SIR claims $s_1$ and $s_1^*$ to be propositionally equivalent. Expressed as functions, this would mean that $f_{s_1} = f_{s_1^*}$.

According to HIR, $s_1$ is not propositionally equivalent to $s_1^*$, but to $s_1^{**}$.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17}Kölbel would say that indexical relativism does not concern itself so much with the truth-value of a statement, but rather with the proposition that is expressed. Here, in order to introduce the topic, I permit myself this inaccuracy and will be more precise about Kölbel’s position later on.

\textsuperscript{18}Cf. p. 492f, Kölbel (2004).

\textsuperscript{19}Cf. p. 498f, Kölbel (2004).

\textsuperscript{20}Cf. p. 493f, Kölbel (2004).

s^*_1: "The moral code shared by me, you and by Urs requires that Urs does not eat meat."

Generally, a sentence of the form "A should do x" is propositionally equivalent to a sentence either of the form "my moral code requires that A does x" (in HIR) or of the form "the moral code shared by me, you and by A requires that A does x".

It is easy enough to see that this type of relativism sees the relativity come in between the character and the content of a sentence. Thus, it is the context that needs to specify a certain parameter which the proposition expressed by a moral judgment is relative to.\(^\text{22}\) The parameter in this case will be either the moral code of the speaker (for SIR) or the moral code shared by the speaker, the listener(s) and the subject of the sentence (for HIR).

Applied to Kaplan’s notation, the index specifying the context of use might look like this:

\[ i' = (w, t, p, a, m, \ldots), \]

where \(m\) stands for the moral code mentioned above.

In order to assure simplicity of the paper at hand, I will only look at SIR and not at HIR. I am confident that what I say will be applicable to HIR as well. So \(m\) in \(i'\) will stand for the moral code of the speaker.

After the proposition (or the content) is determined, there is no more relativity. For IR, the double index looks like this \((i'_1, i_2)\), while in \(i_2\) the moral code must not be specified or is redundant. Thus, only the value of \(f_s\) is dependent on the moral code, not the value of \(g_c\) (the function expressing the content specified by \(f_s\) and the context (including the moral code-parameter)). Once the content is determined, the truth-value of the moral judgment is not relative to a moral code anymore.

### 3.1.1 Virtues and Problems of IR

A virtue of IR that Kölbel mentions is that it integrates relativism into the well understood realm of indexicality.\(^\text{23}\) It classifies moral judgments as sentences containing indexicals like “I am hungry”. These sentences express propositions with definite truth-values and do not rely on strange facts in the world which the truth-value is relative to. It answers objections of metaphysical suspiciousness that usually are brought up against any kind of truth-relativism.


A problem that Kölbel mentions is that IR contorts the content of moral judgments. When it is claimed that $s_1$ is propositionally equivalent to $s_1^*$ or $s_1^{**}$, then, what is said by uttering $s_1$ is not what we always thought was said. We are deceived by our own language, we thought we would talk about Urs and his moral requirements but, actually, we are talking about our own moral code (or that shared by us, you and Urs). This gives reason to think that the analysis given by IR is false.

A further problem for IR is that it cannot account for the existence of genuine moral disagreement. This is where SIR and HIR are different; both try to answer to this objection in different ways. According to Kölbel, both of these replies cannot fully respond to the challenge at hand.

In this paper I do not want to concern myself too much with these problems and virtues. I mention them here because I think it contributes to the understanding of the idea of IR.

3.2 Genuine Relativism (GR)

According to proponents of GR, the truth-value of moral propositions (or contents) is relative to a moral parameter.

"After the context of use has already determined the expressed proposition, it still depends on a parameter if this proposition is true. The parameter might be a code, a system of principles, a perspective or a culture."  

Kölbel tells us that in the second stage (when the content gets a truth-value assigned) there is relativity for proponents of GR. In order to assign a truth-value to certain propositions (or contents), one has to take into account a further parameter, one which the truth-value is relative to. In the context of Kaplan’s tool, we would, in the index representing the circumstances of evaluation, specify another coordinate which expresses this further parameter. In the case of moral judgments, this is a moral parameter. Such a moral parameter can be, as Kölbel puts it, a code, a system of principles, a perspective or a culture. In order to point out the similarities with IR, I will call the further parameter “moral code”, as Kölbel seems to allow.

\textsuperscript{24}Cf. p. 495f, Kölbel (2004).
\textsuperscript{25}Cf. p. 497, Kölbel (2004).
\textsuperscript{26}This my own translation of the following quote in German: "Auch nachdem der Äusserungskontext schon die ausgedrückte Proposition bestimmt hat, hängt es noch immer von einem Parameter ab, ob diese Proposition wahr ist. Der Parameter mag ein Kodex sein, ein System von Prizipien, eine Perspektive oder eine Kultur." (p. 499, Kölbel (2004)).
Thus, according to GR, moral judgments (or moral sentences) express propositions (or contents) that have a truth-value only with respect to a certain moral code.\textsuperscript{27}

To further point out the difference between IR and GR: even though they both rely on the same kind of further parameter, the parameter comes into effect in different stages. According to IR, a moral code-parameter enters the picture while the expressed proposition is determined. Once the proposition is determined, there is no more relativity; the truth-value of the proposition does not depend on a moral code-parameter. In contrast, GR claims that the relativity is (also) in the second stage. Even when the proposition (expressed by a moral judgment) is already determined, the truth-value of the proposition depends on a moral code-parameter.

This difference will have the effect that GR does not have the virtues and problems of IR specified above, according to Kölbel.\textsuperscript{28} If my attempt to show that his distinction collapses in truth-conditional semantics is successful, it will follow that both IR and GR face the same set of problems, whatever they may be.

4 Kölbel’s Distinction in Truth-Conditional Semantics

In this section I would like to show that if a theory of truth-conditional semantics is endorsed, as proposed by Donald Davidson in his “Truth and Meaning”\textsuperscript{29}, the distinction between indexical and genuine relativism cannot be made. For this claim I want to argue in two different, but not necessarily logically independent ways. First, I will argue on the basis of Kaplan’s tool I introduced earlier. There I will use the idea that character and content can be expressed as functions to illustrate my approach in greater detail. Secondly, I will use Alfred Tarski’s so-called T-sentences\textsuperscript{30}, as Davidson did, to argue for my claim.

\textsuperscript{27}Cf. p. 499, Kölbel (2004).
\textsuperscript{28}Cf. p. 499, Kölbel (2004).
\textsuperscript{29}Davidson (1984 [1967]).
\textsuperscript{30}See Tarski (1956 [1935]).
4.1 Meanings Not as Entities

The theory of truth-conditional semantics is known as a type of non-propositional semantics. It denies the existence of meanings as entities. This means that there is no such thing as an entity that can be identified as the meaning of the use of a sentence, such as a mental state, an abstract entity, a proposition or a content.

It is easy to see how the distinction between indexical and genuine relativism collapses in such a view. If there is no middleman (like the content) between the sentence and the truth-value, there cannot be the two distinct stages of assigning a truth-value to a sentence. The question, in which stage the relativity comes into play, then, is a futile one. Thus, Köbels’s distinction collapses.

This point is fairly coarse, as it is put here. In the following section, I will illustrate this point in a more detailed and technical way.

4.1.1 Kaplan’s tool

Truth-conditional semantics holds that the meaning of a sentence is given by its truth-conditions, the state of the world in which the sentence would be true. All we need for determining the meaning of a certain sentence is the state of the world in which the sentence is true. Again, I want to express these states of the world as indices \( i' = (w, t, p, a, m, ...) \).

Let us look at the example \( s_1 \) again: “Urs should not eat meat”. We want to evaluate this sentence in a double index \( \langle i'_1, i'_2 \rangle \). First, we need to specify the context \( i'_1 \). For this, let’s say that we are looking at my utterance of \( s_1 \).

How would a proponent of SIR analyze this utterance? The following coordinates of the context would need to be specified: the speaker: Jonas Rogger (j), and the moral code: the moral code of Jonas Rogger (mj). All other coordinates of the context (e.g. world \( w^* \), time \( t \) and location \( p \)) seem not to be relevant for now, so we will not specify them any further. This gives us \( i'_1 = (w^*, t, p, j, mj, ...) \). And further, this will give us the following:

\[
(3) \quad f_{s_1}(i'_1) = g_{c_1} = \text{“The moral code of Jonas Rogger requires that Urs does not eat meat.”}
\]

Next, we want to specify the circumstances of evaluation \( i'_2 \). According to GR we need to specify the world and the relevant moral code. As I was

\[\text{Strictly speaking, Davidson would not go as far as denying the existence of meanings as entities. What he holds, is that meanings as entities are absolutely useless for any theory of meaning. (Cf. p. 20, Davidson [1984 [1967]].)}\]
the speaker, the relevant moral code will be my moral code. As we want to evaluate the content of my utterance in the actual world, the index will be $i'_2 = (w^*, t, p, j, m_j, ...)$. Among the non-relevant features of the circumstances are the time $t$, the location $p$ and the agent $j$. Let’s say, my moral code actually requires that Urs does not eat meat, then we will have the following:

(4) $g_{c_1}(i'_2) = t$.

Now, since truth-conditional semantics deny the existence of contents or propositions as the meaning of uses of sentences, it does not make sense to use $g_{c_1}$ here. However, since we know that $f_{s_1}(i'_1) = g_{c_1}$, we can just formulate it this way:

(5) $f_{s_1}(i'_1)(i'_2) = t$,

or, by slightly changing the notation but not its intent:

(6) $f_{s_1}(i'_1, i'_2) = t$,

and this can easily be expressed in the following fashion:

(7) $f_{s_1}(w^*, t, p, j, m_j, ..., w^*, t, p, j, m_j, ...) = t$.

Truth-conditional semantics asks for the conditions (or the state of the world) under which a sentence is true. For my utterance of $s_1$, these conditions can be expressed as the argument of $f_{s_1}$ above, namely

$(w^*, t, p, j, m_j, ..., w^*, t, p, j, m_j, ...)$. 

As we can see, as specifying the truth-conditions of $s_1$, this has many redundant coordinates. In order to specify the truth-conditions of $s_1$, we do not need to mention the features of the world more than once. When we eliminate all double mentioning, we will get the truth-conditions of my utterance expressed as index $i''_{s_1}$:

$i''_{s_1} = (w^*, t, p, j, m_j, ...)$. 

Now it is easy to see how Köbels distinction collapses. Since it is the case that $i'_1 = i''_{s_1} = i''_2$, there is no difference between adding the moral code as a parameter to the context or to the circumstances. Either way, the parameter will end up as a single parameter in the truth-conditions of the use of the sentence, since the moral code is the same in both cases.

32 Of course, $i'_1, i''_{s_1}$ or $i''_2$ could differ in what belongs to the unspecified coordinates expresses by “...”. Let’s take “=” here to mean identity between all the relevant coordinates of the indices.
4.2 Tarski’s T-sentences

In Davidson’s “theory of meaning”\textsuperscript{33}, in order to determine the meaning of a sentence, one has to know the T-sentence that specifies the sentence’s truth-conditions. T-sentences were first introduced by Tarski in his “The concept of truth in formalized languages”\textsuperscript{34}. They were intended as a definition of truth in formal languages. Tarski wants to define truth in the object language by using the concept of meaning.

Davidson, on the other hand, aims to use Tarski’s truth-definition to support his own account of meaning in natural languages. Davidson turns Tarski’s approach upside down and, in turn, tries to define the meaning of sentences (or uses of sentences) in the object language by relying on the concept of truth in the metalanguage.\textsuperscript{35} According to Davidson, to every sentence in the object language (e.g. “snow is not yellow”) there is a correspondent T-sentence in the form of \((T)\).

\((T)\) “Snow is not yellow” is \textit{true* iff} snow is not yellow.

The T-sentence \((T)\) is spelled out in the metalanguage (here: English \((\cup\{\text{true*}\})\)). The sentence mentioned by using quotation marks (on the left of the biconditional) is in the object language (here: English).

The predicate “true*” for the object language, which then has all the true sentences of our object language in its extension,\textsuperscript{36} is defined by infinitely many T-sentences, one for every sentence in the object language. This means that the concept of truth, already understood in the metalanguage (e.g. English), is used to define the predicate “true*” for the object language (e.g. English). This, in the same instant, determines the meaning of each sentence (or use of a sentence) in the object language.\textsuperscript{37} The sentence on the right of the biconditional represents the truth-conditions of the sentence on the left of the biconditional.

Of course, to make it plausible that we can find a uniquely relevant T-sentence for every sentence in our object language (e.g. English), we need more assumptions and arguments which Davidson tried to bring forth\textsuperscript{38} but which I will not discuss in this paper. Let’s just assume, for now, that we can find such a T-sentence for every sentence in our object language, English.

\textsuperscript{33}p. 23, Davidson [1984 [1967]].
\textsuperscript{34}Tarski [1956 [1935]].
\textsuperscript{35}Cf. p. 23ff, Davidson [1984 [1967]].
\textsuperscript{36}Cf. p. 23, Davidson [1984 [1967]].
\textsuperscript{37}Cf. p. 24, Davidson [1984 [1967]].
\textsuperscript{38}For example, see Davidson [1984 [1967]].
Now the question imposes itself upon us: How do T-sentences for sentences like $s_1$ look like? Prima facie, one would think that the T-sentence for the sentence $s_1$ just looks like this:

\[(T_1) \text{"Urs should not eat meat" is true}^* \text{ iff Urs should not eat meat.}\]

But, by now, we have learned that it is more complicated than that. If we look at $s_1$ with regard to a relativist view and with regard to Köbbel’s distinction, we will see that either (i) IR tells us that against the appearance, sentences like $s_1$ contain indexicals and thus should be treated the way Davidson usually treats sentences containing indexicals, or (ii) GR tells us that the truth-conditions of sentences like $s_1$ are not as we thought, because they depend on a further parameter. In the following, I will investigate options (i) and (ii) a bit further.

### 4.2.1 T-sentence for $s_1$ according to IR

According to IR, $s_1$ contains hidden indexicals. For this reason we should look at what Davidson says about indexicals.

“We could take truth to be a property, not of sentences, but of utterances, or speech acts, or ordered triples of sentences, times, and persons; but it is simplest just to view truth as a relation between a sentence, a person, and a time.”

A bit further down, he gives us an example of a T-sentence for a sentence containing indexicals:

“`I am tired’ is true as (potentially) spoken by $p$ at $t$ if and only if $p$ is tired at $t$.”

So, Davidson includes certain coordinates (namely, the agent and the time) of the context of use in the T-sentence of a sentence containing indexicals.

As, according to IR, $s_1$ contains indexicals (because it is propositionally equivalent to $s_1^*$ or $s_1^{**}$), we should add coordinates of the context of use here, too. For SIR, the relevant coordinate of the context of use is the moral code, so we add it to the T-sentence (expressed by the variable “$m$”). This will give us the following T-sentence:

\[(T_{IR}) \text{"Urs should not eat meat" is true}^* \text{ as uttered by someone holding $m$ iff $m$ requires that Urs does not eat meat.}\]

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39p. 34, Davidson (1984 [1967]).  
40p. 34, Davidson (1984 [1967]).
4.2.2 T-sentence for $s_1$ according to $GR$

With $GR$, it is consistent that $s_1$ does not contain any indexicals, not even hidden ones. One would think that according to the following quote of Davidon, the T-sentence for $s_1$ should, then, look like $(T_1)$ above.

"If we suppose questions of logical grammar settled, sentences like "Bardot is good" raise no special problems for a truth definition."

[...] Even if we hold there is some important sense in which moral and evaluative sentences do not have a truth value (for example, because they cannot be verified), we ought not to boggle at 'Bardot is good' is true if and only if Bardot is good';

[...] What is special to evaluative words is simply not touched: the mystery is transferred from the word 'good' in the object language to its translation in the metalanguage."\(^{41}\)

According to Davidon, we do not need to worry about complications when we formulate T-sentences for sentences containing expressions like "good", "evil" or "should". Their “mystery”\(^{42}\) stays alive in the metalanguage. However they behave in the meta-language, that’s how they will behave in the object language and vice versa.

Therefore, it seems that we do not have to worry about the account of $GR$ on moral judgments like $s_1$. $(T_1)$ tells us how to treat the sentence "Urs should not eat meat" in the object language, namely exactly the same way as in the metalanguage. It is in the metalanguage, where we worry about the parameter of moral code to which the truth of $s_1$ (in the metalanguage) is relative. By the biconditional, this relativity is transferred into the object language.

This is not how I understand Davidon here. If it would be that easy, why does he even bother with adjusting T-sentences for sentences containing indexicals? Also, it would speak against the two previous argumentations that Köbel’s distinction collapses in truth-conditional semantics.

The very first sentence of the quote above leads to how we should understand Davidon here;

\(^{41}\)p. 31, Davidon ([1984 [1967]]).

\(^{42}\)p. 31, Davidon ([1984 [1967]].

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If we suppose questions of logical grammar settled, sentences like ‘Bardot is good’ raise no special problems for a truth definition.43

That \((T_1)\) is the T-sentence of \(s_1\) would only be true if the questions of logical grammar of moral judgments like \(s_1\) were settled. But as we can see in the debate between moral relativist and absolutist, or in the debate between proponents of IR and GR, questions of that sort are not settled.

This is why I will try to formulate a T-sentence for \(s_1\) that is in the spirit of GR. Since in GR the truth-value of sentences like \(s_1\) is relative to a further parameter (the moral code), this further parameter should appear in the T-sentences (again, expressed by “m”). \((T_2)\) is a first version of how the T-sentence for \(s_1\), according to GR, could look like.

\((T_2)\) “Urs should not eat meat” is true* iff \(m\) requires that Urs does not eat meat.

Now, we wonder what the moral code \(m\) is. In \((T_2)\), it should be specified which moral code \(m\) is relevant, otherwise the truth-conditions of \(s_1\) are underdetermined. As we are looking at certain utterances of moral judgments by certain speakers, it seems clear that we care about the moral code of the speaker. To specify this in a T-sentence, the variable \(m\) has to be specified on the left of the biconditional. Proponents of GR will end up with the following T-sentence for \(s_1\):

\((T_{GR})\) “Urs should not eat meat” is true* as uttered by someone holding \(m\) iff \(m\) requires that Urs does not eat meat.

As \((T_{GR})\) and \((T_{IR})\) are identical, the truth-conditions of \(s_1\) are the same no matter what type of relativism (within Kölbel’s distinction) is supposed. This means a sentence like \(s_1\) has the same meaning and the same truth-value according to IR as well as to GR.

Once again, we can see that Kölbel’s distinction between indexical and genuine relativism collapses if truth-conditional semantics is endorsed.

5 Conclusive Remarks

In the last section I was trying to show that Kölbel’s distinction between indexical and genuine relativism collapses if a truth-conditional semantics is endorsed.

43p. 31, Davidson (1984 [1967]).
If this was successful, I was able to show that the distinction has no substance in at least one well-known semantic theory. If he wants to maintain his claim that his distinction is substantial, Kölbl is now forced to say something about his semantic background theory. At the very least, he has to limit his distinction to those semantic theories in which it is substantial.

References


