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Relativistic Content and Disagreement

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Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne's *Relativism and Monadic Truth* presses a number of worries about relativistic content.¹ It forces one to think carefully about what a relativist should mean by saying that speakers disagree or contradict one another in asserting such content. My focus is on this question, though at points (in particular in Section 4) I touch on other issues Cappelen and Hawthorne (CH) raise.²

1. Why Relativism? The first half of *Relativism and Monadic Truth* discusses several arguments for relativistic content. One, put schematically, runs so:

The argument from same-saying. When A and B use the sentence S, they can be reported as having said the same thing by saying *A and B said that S*. This is evidence that the content of S is constant across contexts. But in many such cases we have strong intuitions that the original uses have different truth values. Ascribing relativistic content to S explains this best.

Such is perhaps the sort of argument someone has in mind if they reason so: Mary finds Sam attractive and says 'Sam's cute'; Beth finds Sam unattractive but (lying, in order to make Mary happy) says 'Yes, Sam's cute'. Mary and Beth said that Sam is cute. But since one's (considered) judgments about who is attractive are authoritative for one, what Mary says is true, what Beth says is false. Taking the content of 'Sam is cute' to be true only relative to (a world and) a judge explains this.

A second kind of argument, schematically put, runs so:

The argument from disagreement. When A uses S and B uses its negation, they can be reported as disagreeing by saying *A and B disagree about whether S*. This is evidence that the content of S is constant across contexts. But in many such cases we have strong intuitions that the original uses are both true. Ascribing relativistic content to S explains this best.

If one changes the argument above by having Beth tell the truth as she sees it (and ascribes truth to Mary and Beth's utterances), one gets a version of this argument.

CH object to the argument from same-saying. They point out that there are many cases in which it is implausible to think that the report involved in the argument is a report that for some p, each speaker said p. Example: Kavalier in the Village utters 'a local bar serves Absinthe'; so does Clay on 125th Street; each means a bar local to him and his audience. Kavalier and Clay said that a local bar serves Absinthe, but, it would seem, the contents of their utterances are different. As CH observe, in cases like this an appeal to variable binding, perhaps involving unphoneticized lambda abstraction, provides an economical explanation of how *X and Y said that S* may be true without there being some p such that X and Y each said p.³

I wonder how many theorists have been led to relativism by anything like the argument from same-saying. CH ascribe 'variations on this line of thought' to Cappelen and Lepore (2003, 2004), Hawthorne (2004), Richard (2004), Egan, Hawthorne and Weatherson (2005), MacFarlane (2005, 2007), and Stanley (2005).⁴ Cappelen and Hawthorne have authority about their own past intentions. For myself, I have to say that even a cursory reading of Richard 2004 makes it clear that it does **not** rely on this line of argument; it is clear from its first pages that the motivation for relativism about (for example) what's said using an adjective like 'rich' is the fact that we perceive speakers in different conversations (with different standards of wealth) who differ over the truth of 'Mary is rich' to **disagree** as to whether Mary is rich.⁵

CH do not really object to the argument from disagreement as an argument for relativistic content. But they do criticize a third kind of argument for relativism, and one might think that some of their remarks about this third argument show something

problematic with various uses of the argument from disagreement. The third argument, again stated schematically, goes as follows:

The argument from agreement. When one person uses S and another does too, they can be reported as agreeing (and so reported with *the users agree about whether S*). This is evidence that the content of S is constant across contexts. But in many such cases we have strong intuitions that the reported uses are to be ascribed different truth values. Ascribing relativistic content to the uses explains this best.

CH say this argument is flawed. They first observe that from the fact that

Kavalier and Clay agree that S

is made true by an utterance of Kavalier's and one of Clay's, it doesn't follow that those utterances had the same content. Suppose Kavalier utters 'Rosa is in Windsor CT' and Clay utters 'Rosa is in Darien CT'. We can say that Kavalier and Clay said that Rosa is in CT. But the original utterances did not have the same content. In general: if Kavalier utters T, Clay utters U and the uses of T and U say something that entails what's said by V, we can (often) truly say *Kavalier and Clay said that V*.

As CH go on to observe, there seems to be every reason to think that the sort of thing just discussed might happen in a case in which sentence T = sentence U. And if so, so much the worse for the argument from agreement. CH think their observation is "particularly pertinent" to certain cases in which one may argue for relativistic content:

Suppose a reporter is observing two people, Joe Coach and Joe Normal. Joe Coach is a basketball coach who is reluctant to apply 'tall' to people, and indeed predicates 'tall' of someone only when that person is over 6 feet 8 inches tall. Joe Normal ... happily applies 'tall' to anyone over 6 feet tall. It will not seem very natural for the observer to claim that Joe Coach and Joe Normal disagree about

whether a person who is 6 feet 4 inches is tall. But it will seem quite natural to claim that Joe Coach and Joe Normal agree that a person who is 7 feet tall is tall.

(62)

CH invoke the point a paragraph back to argue that the truth of the report ‘Coach and Normal think that he [a 7 foot center] is tall’ does not imply that the two Joes express the same thing with ‘he is tall’.⁶

Two remarks are in order here. (1) Even if the point about the “argument from agreement” is sound, it doesn’t seem to show that there is a problem with the “argument from disagreement”. If the truth of the report *Kavalier and Clay disagree whether S* is based on Kavalier’s utterance of *S* and Clay’s utterance of *not S*, that must be because the two utterances express or entail inconsistent claims, one of which can be reported using *S*. It is not easy to see how this could be without *S* expressing the same thing on all three uses. (2) The case imagined in the citation from CH, in which Coach is *reluctant* to call those under 6’8” tall is not the critical one for an argument that ‘tall’ has relativistic content. The critical case is the one in which Coach actually denies that those under 6’8” are tall (and is accommodated by conversational partners), while Normal says that those over 6’ are tall (and is likewise accommodated). It is in *this* sort of case that we are perfectly comfortable reporting disagreement and in which the argument from disagreement has traction.⁷

Whatever problems the arguments from agreement and from same-saying might have, they don’t seem to be problems for the argument from disagreement. Indeed, there’s not really anything in the first half of CH’s book that shows there is a problem with this argument. The primary conclusion of the first half of CH’s book, then, seems to be that there is a very strong argument, the argument from disagreement, for relativistic content. I agree.

2. What is Disagreement? CH say that for X and Y to agree that P is for X and Y to believe the proposition that P (60); presumably disagreement is to be understood as a matter of one person believing a proposition, another believing its negation. It’s not clear a relativist can rest content with such a simple definition of disagreement. We would not say that Kavalier disagrees with Clay if Kavalier believes at midnight ‘New York is

quiet' while Clay believes at noon 'New York is not quiet'. But if one ascribes relativistic content to 'New York is quiet', saying that it expresses the same proposition at any time, the simple definition seems to have one saying they disagree. Something similar is true of some views that make "*de se* propositions" the objects of belief. If we think that different uses of *I am so and such* (for context insensitive *so and such*) express beliefs having the same object, we had better come up with a definition of disagreement that does not imply disagreement when Clay thinks 'my pants are on fire' and Kavalier thinks 'my pants aren't on fire'.

One reaction to such examples is that they don't show a problem with the simple definition of disagreement, but a problem with the idea of temporal or *de se* propositions. I admit to a certain sympathy with this response. But a relativist about matters of taste or humor may also be uncomfortable with the simple definition. Do we disagree if I find Eddie Izzard funny, you are simply unmoved, and we regard each other's reactions as not worth arguing about or attempting to change? Well, we do and we don't. On the one hand, there is something that I accept and that you reject. On the other hand, though I believe that Izzard is funny and know that you believe he is not, I will be loathe to say you are mistaken. In such a situation I am likely to deny that you are in error: *Jedes Tierchen hat sein Plaisierchen*. It is odd to say that in such a situation we disagree, for disagreement seems to imply that not everyone is correct.

Call whatever it is, relative to which it is sensible to evaluate claims for truth or falsity, *circumstances*. Say that claims are *incompatible* provided there is no circumstance relative to which both are true. Whatever disagreement is, it requires incompatible beliefs or assertions.⁸ If we do not disagree in the case of Mr. Izzard, there must be more to disagreement than inconsistent beliefs.

What else could be needed? Suppose you see John sit and believe that John is sitting; suppose your near-twin in a nearby world sees John stand and believes that John is standing. Your beliefs are incompatible but you do not disagree.⁹ Why? The fact that you can't argue about it seems neither here nor there –that doesn't stop us disagreeing with the dead. Rather, there is no disagreement because there is no circumstance relative to which it is sensible to evaluate both your belief and your near-twin's.

Both an attitude and its content *may* be evaluated for truth relative to any circumstance whatsoever.¹⁰ If we simply ask of a content *p* and circumstance *i* *Is p true at i?*, questions about whether it is sensible to evaluate *p* at *i* should not arise. But such questions may well arise about evaluating a token attitude at a particular circumstance. A particular attitude –my belief or your desire, say –bears special relations to particular circumstances. My belief was formed in my situation and is supposed to be about it, not about the way things are in another world. Your desire was formed in your situation and is supposed to be about it, not about how things were in ancient Thebes. When we assess my belief as true or false, we are interested in whether it is true or false of a circumstance at which “it is aimed” or with which it is supposed to be concerned; likewise with your desire. Anyone who is a fan of temporalist or *de se* propositions should say something analogous about temporal or *de se* beliefs.

A believer believes “for his own case”: he finds himself in a particular circumstance; his beliefs are beliefs about his circumstances; his belief is always appropriately evaluated as true or false relative thereto. Sometimes a belief is appropriately evaluated relative to other circumstances as well. You think Mary is rich, I think your criteria for wealth are defective and that in fact Mary is not rich. Thinking that my criteria are better than yours, I think that your belief ought be evaluated relative to my criteria. In such a case it will be sensible for me to evaluate your belief relative to them.¹¹ In a case like this –in which there is single perspective relative to which it is sensible to evaluate both your belief that Mary is rich and my belief that she is not –we disagree. To say that *x* and *y* disagree is to say that there is a content *p* such that one of *x* and *y* believes it, the other believes its denial, and there is a circumstance relative to which it is appropriate to evaluate both *x*’s belief and *y*’s belief.

3. Judgments of Disgust. CH think the strongest case for relativistic content is the case of judgments about what is (physically) disgusting¹². According to them, and in summary:

(a) “The folk” are “primitively tempted towards” the view that judgments involving a “range of predicates of personal taste” (including ‘disgusting’) deploy “a sensibility that, when properly manifested, would converge on our own judgments.” (117)

(b) When we focus on how these judgments depend on emotional, social, and other contingent factors, we often lose a sense of disagreement when one person contradicts another. (117-18)

(c) When one reflects on the sorts of factors mentioned in (b), one “loses[s] all sense of any deep objectivity” in judgments that something is (physically) disgusting. (119)

(d) “plenty of informants” are “uncomfortable” in a range of cases with the idea that when one person calls something disgusting and another says it’s not disgusting the two in fact disagree. (119)

(e) The stronger one’s intuition that ‘no one is at fault’ in a disagreement over what is disgusting, the weaker one’s intuition that there is really a disagreement. (120)

I am not sure what to make of the speculation in (a), particularly its suggestion of a primitive temptation to posit universal norms (grounded in evolution? culture? mum’s cooking?) with “my” views at the center. I’m also unclear what force (c) is supposed to have. Even without meditating on the origins and grounds of our judgments about how hot, delicious, or disgusting something is, most of us are convinced that those judgments are not objective in the sense that each person’s grounds and justification for making such judgments are intimately related to their own considered reactions. That this is so –that our judgments are not objective in the sense of being grounded in interpersonally objective standards --is the *starting* point for a relativist story about such judgments. I am not sure why it is supposed to be an objection to it. As far as (b), (d), and (e) go: it

should be clear from the discussion in the last section that I think they are more or less accurate, if incomplete, descriptions of the phenomenology of reflection on disagreement over taste. They are just what one would expect if (what I have presented as) the relativist picture of disagreement is correct.

CH press other examples against the relativist to which the last section's discussion is relevant. For example, they complain that a "blanket relativist" about judgments of taste –by which (I think) they mean someone who holds that a literal interpretation of any sentence of the form *a is F* (*is F* a taste predicate) has a relativistic content –makes "unacceptable predictions about contradictoriness". For example

We have no intuition of contradiction when a child says 'The summer will be fun' on account of getting to go to a music camp and a parent, in a separate conversation, says 'The summer won't be fun' on account of having to work overtime to pay for the music camp for the child. (122)

I suggested above that there is a difference between people's having beliefs or making assertions that are incompatible and their disagreeing with one another. I would likewise suggest that we allow that people can have views that are incompatible or make assertions that are incompatible without their contradicting one another. In this regard, note how our judgments seem to sort themselves. We would say that the parent thinks exactly the opposite of what the child does, and so they have incompatible beliefs about the summer. Nonetheless, we do not think the parent is *contradicting* the child. I would say that this is because it is clear that the parent's claim is not supposed to apply to –to be evaluated within –the child's perspective.¹³

I suggested in the last section that what one wants from an account of judgments of taste is an explanation of how such an assessment of the parent and the child is coherent. I think a relativist account offers the beginning of such an explanation; I don't see that there is a viable alternative in the sort of contextualism that CH endorse.

4. Ascriptions of Relativistic Content. CH assume that most relativists want to say (for example) that if Cassius and Brutus each assert

Volturius believes that cooked okra is delicious
'those assertions cannot vary in truth value according to the differences in operative standards of taste' between the contexts of Brutus and Cassius' utterances. (15) CH assume this because they think that the relativist wants to say that (ignoring tense, conventional demonstratives, and indexicals) whatever relativity the content of *P* may have, that relativity is not inherited by the predicate *believes that P*. The idea behind this assumption –which is indeed part of standard versions of relativism –is that relativistic content is often the object of attitudes like belief and assertion, and (when *P* has such content) the predicate *believes that P* is a vehicle for ascribing belief in *P*'s content. They call this idea *the non-relativity of belief*.

CH think it will be hard for relativists to maintain anything like this idea; as a result they wonder how the relativist will explain attitude ascriptions in which expressions with relativistic content occur. They give an example that is supposed to make it puzzling how a relativist can hold onto the non-relativity of belief. Here is a variant of the example: Cassius and Brutus find cooked okra disgusting; Volturius finds it delicious. Cassius thinks there is okra in the gumbo, Brutus does not. Because of this last disagreement, Brutus says to Volturius

Cassius thinks you'll find something delicious in the gumbo, but I don't.

As CH observe, the felicity of this does not seem to be explained by anything at all like non-relativity of belief.¹⁴

I agree: the felicity of this is explained by principles that appear to govern when attitude ascriptions are felicitous, principles quite orthogonal to debates about relativistic content. Consider some examples.

Suppose that Cassius travels a lot and thus knows something about nightlife in various European cities. Since he is getting older, his judgments about the quality of live music are not altogether reliable. Still, they aren't completely unreliable. We are in Milan; you ask me what we should do. I recall Cassius saying something like 'There is a terrific music scene in every big city in Italy'. I can in this case say to you

Cassius thinks that the local music scene is terrific, though I don't know if that's so.

This is perfectly felicitous. Is it true? Well, there is no reason to think that Cassius believes what a correct semantics (on *anyone's* view) assigns to my use 'the local music scene is terrific': He needn't be supposed to know that Milan is local to you or me (or to himself). What's going on here, then? Well, it's *very* easy to get from what I know Cassius to believe (that Milan is a large Italian city and there is a terrific music scene in all large Italian cities) and what it is obvious that we both know (that Milan is local to us) to the claim that the local music scene is terrific. When something like this is so –that is, when *x's* beliefs and the conversation's presuppositions allow an easy inference to some *p* that is conversationally relevant –we often allow ourselves to say *x thinks that p*. Whether such utterances are strictly true or just felicitous shorthand is a matter we don't need to settle here.

A related but slightly different example. Suppose Caesar thinks of Cinna and Casca as his friends, but Cassius and I think they are false friends. Caesar knows we think this, but it's never discussed; when relevant in a conversation between Caesar and one of us, all allow it to be assumed that Cinna and Casca are friends of Caesar. Caesar wants to know where his friends (= Cinna and Casca) are. I know that Cassius thinks that Cinna and Casca are at the Senate; I think one of them might be at the baths. I say

Cassius thinks your friends are at the Senate, but I'm not so sure.¹⁵

Again, this is perfectly felicitous. I would explain the felicity of this example using the same principle we used above: There is something Cassius thinks –that Cinna and Casca are at the Senate –which when combined with conversational presuppositions –that Cinna and Casca are friends of Caesar's –allows an easy inference to something conversationally relevant –that Caesar's friends Cinna and Casca are at the Senate. So by the principle invoked above I can ascribe belief in the conversationally relevant thing to Cassius.¹⁶ Note that the second premises in the inference is only required to be a conversational presupposition –it is **not** something that I am required to believe (or, for

that matter, that Cassius is required to believe, or that Caesar is required to believe I believe). Conversational presuppositions are things that conversants *assume* (and assume other conversants assume) for the purposes of the conversation.

At this point, it should be clear what I think we should say about CH's original example. In its natural fleshings out Brutus makes his remarks about the gumbo in a conversation in which it is presupposed that he knows Volturius' taste in vegetables and wants to be helpful. In this case it is enormously plausible to think that it will be presupposed that what Volturius thinks is delicious is indeed delicious. Making such a presupposition is of a piece with doing things like going along for the conversational ride with Caesar in presupposing that Cinna and Casca are his friends, in order to facilitate conversation. Thus Brutus's original utterance will be felicitous, since it ascribes to Cassius belief in a claim that is an easy inference from a conversational presupposition – that okra is delicious –and something the speaker knows Cassius believes –that the gumbo contains okra.

Forget relativism for the moment. Most of us think that a good rule of thumb is that something of the form *x believes that P* is true in a context in *c* only if what *x* names (in *c*) has a belief with the content of *P* (in *c*). But when we are ascribing beliefs, we are in a neighborhood where pragmatics and semantics bang against each other all the time. For example, the principle discussed in the last three paragraphs will require either that we sharply distinguish truth from felicity (so that my ascriptions to Cassius are felicitous though false) or that we make the truth conditions of attitude ascriptions disjunctive (so that my ascriptions are true though Cassius doesn't have a belief state with the relevant content). The issues here are familiar and have nothing to do with whether some content is relativistic. Precisely the same remarks apply to the principle CH call 'the non-relativity of belief'. Something very much like that principle is surely true. But there is a lot of noise in the neighborhood, having nothing to do with relativistic content, noise whose sources may require qualifying the principle in various ways. That this is so in no way shows that there is something wrong with the idea that some content is relativistic.¹⁷

¹ Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009. Subsequent references are indicated parenthetically. By relativistic content, I mean that which is truth evaluable, is the object of attitudes like assertion and belief, and (is the sort of thing) whose truth value is relative to something that is not fixed simply by picking a possible world.

² In what follows I say nothing about the discussion in CH's Chapter 3 of "temporally neutral" content. I agree with the spirit of much of what they say there (though not with everything they say about some of my juvenilia). I agree in particular that an adequate account of the syntax of the tenses and various anaphoric devices shows that there is precious little motivation for temporally neutral content. 'Temporalism and Eternalism Revisted' in Richard, forthcoming, contains an extended discussion of this issue.

I say nothing about CH's discussion of "binding arguments" against certain versions of relativism about predicates of taste because I have already discussed the matter in Chapter 5 of *When Truth Gives Out* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

³ The idea is that the report is understood as equivalent to, even as having a syntax well represented by, *Kavalier and Clay* $\lambda x(x \text{ said that a bar local to } x \text{ serves Absinthe})$. Of course, this helps with predicates of taste (or with other putative examples of relativistic content such as 'tall') only if we are willing to posit argument places in the predicates that are typically not manifest.

⁴ More exactly, they ascribe to these authors a reliance on this argument:

Usually or always, different users of *S* can be reported as having said the same thing with a sentence of the form *the users said that S*. So usually or always different uses of *S* have the same content.

Neither Cappelen and LePore nor Stanley argue for relativism.

⁵ See, for instance, pages 216 and 218 of Richard 2004.

⁶ The idea is that Coach and Normal associate different properties, *P* and *Q*, with 'tall' and the reporter uses 'tall' to express a property true of those who are both *P* and *Q*, false of those who are neither, and otherwise undefined.

⁷ Note that the critical case is one in which Coach and Normal have these dispositions *after* a reference class (or a property determining such) is associated with the predicate: The question to ask is: If Joe thinks anyone over 6'4" is tall (when the relevant class is high school basketball players) but Coach thinks that no one under 6'8" is tall (for this class), do Coach and Normal disagree? It seems to me obvious that they do. It also seems to me obvious that if each one's use is accommodated in a conversation about someone who is 6'6", each speaks truly when one says the person is tall and the other says he is not. See Richard 2004 and 2008, Chapter 4.

⁸ CH observe that there is a sense of 'disagree' (an 'activity sense') on which we say that x disagrees with y when x objects to something that y says, or says 'I disagree'; in this sense of 'disagree' we "disagree" even in a case in which: you and I agree that my pants are orange; you say to me 'your pants are orange'; I in my wretched deafness take you to have said 'your pants are on fire' and consequently say 'no they're not!'. While we do use the verb 'disagree' in such cases, we also say that in such cases that there "isn't really a disagreement." I ignore this use of disagree since it seems irrelevant to the debate about relativistic content.

⁹ Here I am in agreement with John MacFarlane 2007b, who uses an example like this (as well as one like the 'temporal relativist' example several paragraphs back). There is overlap between MacFarlane's view and my own of disagreement, though they are distinct. I won't here compare MacFarlane's formulation to my own.

Cappelen and Hawthorne criticize this sort of example because they think that, since one of the objects in the example is non-existent, there can't be any disagreement in the example:

...even if we unrestrict our quantifiers as far as possible, the [claim that each of two individuals in different worlds accepts some proposition P] does not entail that there are two individuals that accept P. After all, on the most standard metaphysical picture, there is no use of 'everything' so unrestricted that 'everything that exists actually exists' comes out false. (64)

Perhaps it is true “on the most standard metaphysical picture” that ‘everything that exists actually exists’ can’t be understood as false. But we all perfectly well understand and, outside of the metaphysics class, think ‘there are more things that we can (and do) talk about than exist actually’; it’s hard to see how this could be true without the sort of relaxation in which CH refuse to engage. More importantly, the example in the text and the one following it are really devices to make vivid the fact that we all grasp immediately the idea that beliefs with the same content may be about different situations and, when they are, we do not take them to disagree.

Note in this regard that even those who think that nothing exists but the presently existing would describe modern dentists, who think that men and women have the same number of teeth, as disagreeing with Aristotle, who thought that women had fewer teeth in men. We are quite capable of seeing whether one existent and one non-existent belief do or do not agree or disagree with one another.

¹⁰ Which is not to say that one will get a truth value relative to any circumstance – vagueness or (perhaps) the absence of an object may scotch the evaluation.

¹¹ I am of course here assuming that circumstances involve “perspectives”, which are (in part) determined by things like standards for applying the notion of wealth.

¹² CH specifically set disgust judgments involving moral evaluation to the side.

For the record, I think that cases involving adjectives like ‘rich’ discussed in Richard 2004 and 2008 provide the strongest case for relativistic content. In these examples: different standards for ‘rich’ are associated by speakers in two different conversations; uses involving those standards are accommodated in each conversation (with the adjective’s “reference class” constant across conversations); we have strong intuitions of disagreement across conversations. It is of course particularly unappealing to postulate covert ‘judge arguments’ as occurring in adjectives like ‘rich’ (or, for that matter, in phrases like ‘rich for a 21st century New Yorker’).

¹³ It is worth pointing out that *nobody* seems to have ever defended a “blanket relativism” about judgments of taste. It is no part of the agenda of those who think that words like ‘fun’ have relativistic content to say that on **no** occasion is ‘fun’ is elliptical for ‘fun for me’. The point in the text is that given (what Section 2 suggests is) a proper

understanding of the nature of disagreement, relativists are not committed to the claim that whenever two people endorse incompatible contents they thereby disagree.

¹⁴ I have changed the details of the example to make the situation involved one we can imagine actually happening (CH's example involves a talking animal). It is probably relevant that in CH's example it is natural to assume that it would be common knowledge between Brutus and Volturius that Volturius' assessments of disgustingness and deliciousness were very different from Brutus's and Cassius's.

¹⁵ Those who think the example's point can be avoided by reading the ascription *de re* should construct variants in which 'friend' plays a predicative role while not occurring within an expression that could be interpreted as a singular term.

¹⁶ How is my utterance of 'I'm not so sure [that your friends are at the Senate]' to be understood in this case? Obviously in terms involving the principle discussed in the text: Given that principle and the fact that it is presupposed that Cinna and Casca are Caesar's friends, the principle licenses me *if I believe that Cinna and Casca are at the Senate* to utter 'I think that your friends are at the Senate'. My saying that I am not so sure about that is clearly supposed to convey to Caesar that I don't think that his friends are there. If we suppose that 'I think your friends are at the Senate' is only felicitous and not true, exactly what principle licenses the negation in this case is not altogether clear. But it is well known that we often use negation to convey the denial of something only pragmatically associated with the negated sentence.

These remarks are of course relevant to the interpretation of Brutus' utterance of 'I don't [think you'll find something delicious in the gumbo]' in the original example.

¹⁷ Thanks to Nancy Bauer for comments and to a seminar on contemporary relativism at Tufts in Fall 2009 for spirited discussion.

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