

## Chapter 5: The Instability of Incompleteness Arguments

### C+L on the structure of incompleteness arguments:

Stage 1: A solicitation of an intuition to the effect that the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance of a sentence S (according to Semantic Minimalism) is incomplete, i.e., it is not the kind of thing that can take a truth value

Stage 2: A solicitation of an intuition to the effect that utterances of S have a truth value, e.g., that they can express propositions, and hence, do have truth conditions, and so, can take a truth value

Conclusion: Something unaccounted for by Semantic Minimalism must be added in the context of the utterance in order for a complete proposition to be semantically expressed

Note: C+L's description of Stage 1 seems a bit sloppy. One might think that propositions are just the sort of things that have truth values (except where undefined, perhaps), so it would be odd to think that the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance of a sentence couldn't be the kind of thing that can take a truth value. Maybe the point is that utterances of a sentence S don't semantically express propositions, but this seems to conflict with Stage 2, which requires that utterances of S do express propositions.

Instead, it seems like Stage 1 should be something like: A solicitation of an intuition to the effect that without being given a context, we have no idea what proposition would be semantically expressed by an utterance of a sentence S. (This amounts to saying that the character of S is not a constant function from contexts to propositions.)

[On this way of cashing things out, it's very difficult to see what the difference between CSA's and IA's is supposed to be. Maybe it's just some subtle difference in how the relevant intuitions are elicited.]

### Typical Instances of the Stage 1

1. Tipper is ready (incompleteness: ready for what?)
2. Steel isn't strong enough (incompleteness: strong enough for what?)
3. Peter's book is gray (incompleteness: what's the relationship between Peter and the book?)
4. It's raining (incompleteness: where?)

### Instability of IA's

Basically, C+L try to show that even when (1)-(4) are made more explicit, the same sorts of incompleteness worries can be raised regarding their revised versions.

5. Tipper is ready for the exam (incompleteness: ready for the exam in what regard? To pass it? To ace it?)
6. Steel isn't strong enough to support the roof (incompleteness: Support the roof for how long? Under what conditions?)
7. The book owned by Peter is gray (incompleteness: gray where? On the cover? Or the pages?)
8. It's raining in Palo Alto (incompleteness: everywhere in Palo Alto? When?)

Note: C+L only discuss (6). The other incompleteness worries are my own. Those worries about (7) and especially (8) seem a bit thin, but I agree with their basic point.

Some more examples:

9. This kettle is black (does it count if it's aluminum but soot-covered? Or painted? Or cast iron but glowing from heat?)
10. Smith weighs 80kg (naked in the morning? Dressed normally after lunch? After being force-fed 4 liters of water?)
11. John went to the gym (how? To work out?)
12. Jill didn't have fish for dinner (didn't order fish, or didn't eat fish?)
13. Justine destroyed those shoes (destroyed in what sense?)
14. That's a dangerous dog (dangerous in what respect?)
15. Justine is a philosopher (a professional philosopher, or philosophical in her demeanor?)

Question: Some of these incompleteness arguments might be used not to argue that the characters of such sentences aren't constant functions, but rather to argue that even relative to a context, utterances thereof don't express propositions. The thought would be that even in a particular context, it's not settled whether 'This kettle is black' expresses a proposition that would be true e.g. if it were cast iron but glowing from heat, or aluminum but painted black. This, of course, would be music to Radical Contextualists' ears, though, so I guess C+L would be fine with this, since they think that IA's lead to Radical Contextualism anyway.

### **Two Attempts to Block the Instability Argument**

The Psychological Reply: If a kind of completion, C, is not something usually intended by and communicated by utterances of S, then it's no argument against S's completeness that it fails to explicitly specify (or determine a value for) C.

C+L's response: Incompleteness claims are metaphysical (regarding what propositions exist), not psychological. C+L seem correct here.

Taylor's Reply: In some cases, but not in others, there's a *felt need* to for a contextually determined value (of some covert syntactic constituent) that leads to a *felt inability* to evaluate the truth value of an utterance in the absence of a context that determines a value for that covert syntactic constituent.

C+L's response: This is just a version of the psychological reply, which they've already rejected. Also, they think he's wrong about just when there's a felt need for context to determine some value and a felt inability to evaluate the truth value of an utterance without context determining such a value.