

Recanati, François. *Perspectival Thought: A Plea for Moderate Relativism*. Oxford University Press, 2007. 308 pp. Paper: \$37.95

Perspectival Thought is divided into three “books”, which in turn are divided into 41 very short chapters. The first book gives a detailed introduction to the general framework: *Strong Moderate Relativism* (SMR). Simply put, *relativism* is the view that there are propositions that have their truth-value only relative to certain components of the circumstance of evaluation. For instance, a temporal relativist claims that there are propositions that are true or false relative to different times of evaluation. On Recanati’s view, relativised propositions are true or false relative to *situations*, and an utterance *u* is true just in case the proposition expressed by *u* is true relative to the situation pertaining to *u*. Recanati’s relativism is *moderate* in that he denies that one and the same utterance can have different truth-values at different times. He distinguishes between *explicit* content, which is identified with the proposition expressed, and *complete* content, which is identified with the explicit content together with the situation pertaining to the utterance. In order to determine the truth-value of an utterance, we need the complete content, and since that includes the situation pertaining to the utterance, the truth-value of the utterance will be stable. The purpose of introducing explicit content as an intermediate level between sentence-type meaning and complete content is to be able to distinguish what is *articulated* from the *truth-conditions*. For instance, the two sentence-types ‘It is raining’ and ‘It is raining here’ will both be true in a context in which it is raining at the place of the utterance, but since the place is only articulated in the latter, the explicit content expressed will differ. But in some cases, nothing is left unarticulated, and the explicit content is a full-fledged classical proposition, so it may seem that the explicit content and the complete content sometimes coincide. However, Recanati’s moderate relativism is *strong* in the sense that it makes a principled distinction between explicit and complete content; the latter, but not the former, contains a situation. To illustrate: suppose you are watching a game of poker, in which the woman in front of you has a good hand. You utter: ‘Claire has a good hand now.’ But the woman in front of you is not Claire. At the time, Claire is participating in *another* poker game, and by coincidence, she *has* a good hand. If we just evaluate the explicit content expressed with respect to the actual world, what you say comes out true, since, in the actual world, Claire has a good hand at the time. However, Recanati claims that since the situation pertaining to your utterance does not support the explicit content, there is a sense in which the utterance is not true, and in order to get this result we need to evaluate the explicit content with respect to the situation contained in the complete content.

So, the distinction between explicit and complete content needs to be drawn even in cases where the explicit content is truth-conditionally complete.

In book two and three, Recanati goes on to apply SMR to experience and thought. He distinguishes between the (explicit) content of an experience and the *mode* of experiencing, which determines what kind of situation the content must be evaluated against. For instance, a visual perception with the content *that there is a flower there* will be veridical just in case there is a flower in the place designated by ‘there’ in the subject’s perceptual situation, and that this causes the subject’s experience. Since you do not *see* that the flower causes the experience, this should not be part of the content of the experience, although it should be part of the truth-conditions.

Another central theme is *de se* thoughts and immunity to error through misidentification. Recanati distinguishes between different kinds of *de se* thoughts. When the self figures in the explicit content, the thought is *explicitly de se* — e.g. when I come to know that my legs are crossed by seeing myself in the mirror (in which case the content of the representation will be something like *someone’s legs are crossed, and I am that person*). When the self does not figure in the explicit content, the thought is *implicitly de se* — e.g. when I come to know that my legs are crossed “from the inside.” Since there is no explicit self-identification in implicit *de se* thoughts, they are immune to error through misidentification while explicit *de se* thoughts are not.

Apart from the themes presented above, *Perspectival Thought* contains detailed discussions of issues concerning indexicality, subjectivity, perception, memory, imagination, and more. I highly recommend anyone interested in these issues to read this book. The novice will get a nice introduction to the topic(s), and the more initiated reader can be almost certain to find something to disagree with.

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