

Kent Bach on Minimalism for Dummies

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According to Kent Bach (forthcoming), our book, *Insensitive Semantics* (IS), suffers from its 'implicit endorsement' of (1):

(1) Every complete sentence expresses a proposition (this is Propositionalism, a fancy version of the old grammar school dictum that every complete sentence expresses a complete thought) (Bach (ms.))

In response (C&L, forthcoming), we claim to be unaware of endorsing (1). No argument in IS depends on (1), we say. We don't claim to have shown that that there couldn't be grammatical sentences the semantic contents of which are not propositional.

In response to our response, Bach (ms.) says:

Moreover, C&L insist that “not a single argument in IS depends on our endorsing or rejecting (1).” Here they miss my point. The point is not that they assume (1) in their arguments but that they overlook a version of Semantic Minimalism that does without it and without the minimal propositions that their version requires.

This overlooked version is, not surprisingly, Kent Bach's view. However, the claim that we have overlooked Bach's version of minimalism might be the strangest claim made about *Insensitive Semantics* so far. It's made particularly bizarre by the fact that Bach goes on to discuss our objections to his version of minimalism. We are very puzzled by how Bach can both think that we *overlook* his view and think that our objections to his view are wrong.

To see how peculiar Bach's position is, consider Bach's presentation of our objection to his view (the view, remember, he also thinks that we have overlooked):

The real bone of contention between us is whether or not any sentences are semantically incomplete. The reason they think they need to deny that any are is that they are convinced that conceding that some sentences are semantically incomplete leads one down a slippery slope. For the grounds that lead one to concede this will in consistency force one to admit that all or virtually all sentences are semantically incomplete. (Bach (ms.))

Bach is partly right. This is the kind of argument we use against Bach's arguments for his version of minimalism. It follows that Bach is wrong when he claims that we "... overlook a version of Semantic Minimalism that does without [(1)] and without the minimal propositions that their version requires." We don't overlook it. We just think Bach's arguments for that view are unsound.

Bach goes on to respond to our objection to his view. He says:

I do reply to their central criticism, though rather briefly. They ask, "what are the criteria by which one sentence is deemed semantically incomplete and another complete?" I answer, "a (declarative, indexical-free) sentence is semantically incomplete if it fails to express a proposition."

We'll leave it as an exercise for the reader to evaluate whether this is a good reply. Our goal here is simply to respond to Bach's accusation that we overlook him. We tried hard not to, but our efforts went unappreciated. We hope this little reply will convince Bach that we have no intention of overlooking him, ever.

References

Cappelen and Lepore: *Insensitive Semantics*, Blackwell 2004.

Cappelen and Lepore: "Reply to Bach", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Forthcoming (available here: <http://folk.uio.no/hermanc/docs/BachPPR.pdf>)

Bach, Kent "The Excluded Middle", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Forthcoming¹ (available here: <http://online.sfsu.edu/~kbach/Cappelen&Lepore.pdf>)

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