Reply to Zoltan Szabo

S#1: Szabo's Reservations about the Slippery Slope from Moderate Contextualism to Radical Contextualism

One of Szabo's central objections is his ‘reservations about the alleged slide from moderate to radical contextualism’. First, some background: the argument Szabo expresses doubt about is essential both to the critical part of our book and to its positive part. Our argument against what we call *moderate contextualism* depends on the assumption that it collapses into radical contextualism**.** Our positive view depends on the assumption that for any utterance, we can trigger the intuition that many different propositions are said (this is at the core of our speech act pluralism). So Szabo is attacking one of the key assumptions in *IS* – if his 'reservations' are well justified, most of what we have to say collapses.

To establish these claims, we rely on a tradition in the philosophy of language dating back at least as far as Wittgenstein, continuing through Austin and the ordinary language movement of the 50's and 60's, and is very much alive today in a range of positions that can be roughly labeled as 'neo-Wittgensteinean', including Searle, Sperber/Wilson, Travis, Recanati, Carston, etc. (See Chapter 1 of Carston (2002), and Travis (1985, 1989, 1996), and further references in Chapter 2 of *IS.*) These writers are also among our central targets in *IS* because we disagree with their conclusion, namely, that the kinds of data they focus on show semantics to be impossible. What we don’t dispute is their data – in fact, we take it to be important and correctly described (in that sense our sympathies are much more aligned with the radical than with the moderate contextualists). Where we balk is with the claim that this data imply the radical (semantic) conclusions these authors draw.

We mention this to point out that our case for the collapse of moderate into radical contextualism is *not* meant to be original – we rely largely on examples (and procedures for constructing examples) used by others, though in Chapter 13 we supply various further examples, not used by others. This long tradition is itself an important chunk of empirical data: it shows that the intuitions we appeal to are widely shared, over a rather long period of time, by a wide range of philosophers. Our goal, much like Grice's, is to show how a theory could accommodate both the intuitions of widespread

context sensitivity and the view that there is such a thing as a stable, compositional semantic content. We tried to achieve that goal by sharply distinguishing semantic content from speech act content (what speakers say, assert, claim, etc.).

An obvious feature of the examples, intended to demonstrate the slide from moderate to radical contextualism, is that they all require space: they involve rather elaborate stage setting. You need to get the theorist to imagine she is in a certain kind of setting with certain background assumptions and then she projects herself into those settings and recovers intuitions about what's said. Here we concur with Travis, who, in a related context, says: 'stories which show what we really would say under given circumstances tend to be space consuming, and even at that, more suggestive than specifying' (1985, 198).[4]

Szabo quickly runs through a number of cases in his reply. Each of his comments merits more discussion than we can provide here. Instead we'll first reply briefly to some of Szabo's comments (without much argument). For those we ignore, it will be obvious how to extend our discussion. We then present two additional Context Shifting Arguments of the kind we discuss in Chapter 3. We do this to show that even if Szabo were correct about his 'reservations' about the specific examples we appeal to, others can be constructed that make the same point.

Szabo claims that three of the examples we use are instances of ambiguity – if he were right, that would make them useless for our purposes. But he's not right. What he counts as ambiguity is variability in what is said based on a core meaning. On the view we are recommending, there's a core meaning of 'philosopher', and it can, for example, be used to talk about people who are philosophical and people in a certain profession. From our point of view, it is question begging to assume that this is an instance of ambiguity. The same goes for 'have': we claim there is a core meaning and that it can be used talk about what people were eating. Szabo's appeal to dictionaries is inconclusive because they are not in the business of making the kinds of theoretical distinctions that concern us in this part of *IS*.

[4] For further examples, see Travis' 'grunt' example, this volume and instructions for how to generate these kinds of examples in Travis 'on what is strictly.

The real problem, however, is not who is right or wrong about ambiguity: Even if Szabo were right in *all* his reservations about our examples, it is easy to generate new ones of the kind we rely on for any case that he devises. *Nothing* in our argument depends on specific claims about which expressions are ambiguous. Our strategy is this: When we encounter a sophisticated and ingenious moderate contextualist, such as Szabo, we ask him for an expression he is confident is not ambiguous (or a disambiguation of an ambiguous expression); we then run our examples on that expression (or on that meaning). Here are two such illustrations:

CASE 1: Suppose for the purposes of discussion that 'philosopher' is ambiguous. Take the non-professional sense (Szabo seems to grant there is one). Here is a context shifting argument for that sense of 'philosopher': Take a group of professional philosophers (so there's no doubt that they are philosophers in Szabo's 'professional' sense); we're all familiar with sincere utterances of the form:

> Naomi is not a philosopher; she works in a philosophy department, but she is not a philosopher.

(said of a colleague specializing in, say, set theory) where what we mean to communicate is that she doesn't engage in the kind of activity the speaker in that context takes to be philosophical; what kind of activity that is will vary from one context to another. So someone else, with other philosophical values (and in a context where those values are salient), can utter 'Naomi is a philosopher' and say something true. The non-professional, shared concept of a *philosopher* is not enough to explain (away) our intuitions about such cases.

CASE 2: Second, take 'dangerous'. Szabo claims he can't get the intuition that there are different ways of being dangerous, different understandings of 'dangerous' (as Travis puts it in his reply). Consider these contrasting cases: BACKGROUND: A piece of paper with information on it: 'Mr. Smith was borne on June 7, 1892.' Let's assume also that were this information made public, it would have great implications for a certain trust, hundreds of millions of dollars would be lost by company C. CONTEXT ONE: One of C's lawyers says: 'That's dangerous' (demonstrating the piece of paper (or the information on it). Intuition:

this utterance is true. CONTEXT TWO: Mr. Smith's friend, with no interest in company C, says (at the same time), 'That's dangerous', again demonstrating the piece of paper or the information on it. Intuition: this utterance is not true. Difference in truth-value indicates difference in content.

Our claim is that for any example of a non-ambiguous expression (or a single meaning of an ambiguous expression) we can conjure examples like this. Szabo, presumably, thinks we can't. Limitations of space prevent us from settling that debate here.

S#2: Szabo's 'Core Disagreement' and Minimal Content

We're not crystal clear on how to understand Szabo's 'core' disagreement. He says:

> … let me move on to the core of my disagreement with *Insensitive Semantics*. …. it is hard to see why a speech act pluralist would deny that there is also some proposition that all utterances of 'I have a headache' express – perhaps the proposition that someone has a headache. Why does this not count as the semantic content of 'I have a headache'?

In this passage, it looks like Szabo wants to know why the proposition *that someone has a headache* isn't the semantic content of ´I have a headache'. If semantic content is supposed to be that which all utterances of S have in common, then this would seem to follow on the assumption that it is a proposition expressed by all utterances of 'I have a headache'. Szabo assumes that would be an absurd conclusion. So, we take it, this argument is meant as a kind of reductio of semantic minimalism (it would also make our position internally inconsistent, since we explicitly say this isn't the semantic content).

Reply: First, we would need to see an argument for why speech act pluralism commit us to the view that all utterances of 'I have a headache' express the proposition *that someone has a headache*. We know of no such argument. Second, the result would follow only if we thought a proposition p, by virtue of being a common content for all utterances of S, would be sufficient for p being the semantic content of S. But that's *not* our view. On (144-145), we describe a procedure for determining semantic content of a sentence. Being the common content is not sufficient. The first two are these:

a) Specify the meaning (or semantic value) of every expression in S (doing so in accordance with your favorite semantic theory, i.e., we want Semantic Minimalism to be neutral between the different accounts of how best to assign

semantic values to linguistic expression (e.g., objects, sets, properties, functions, conceptual roles, stereotypes, or whatever));

b) Specify all the relevant compositional meanings rules for English (doing so also in accordance with your favorite semantic theory; again, we insist upon Semantic Minimalism being neutral between different accounts of how best to respect compositionality).

So, the view that the proposition *that someone has a headache* is the semantic content of 'I have a headache' simply does *not* follow from the assumption that this proposition gets expressed by every utterance of that sentence. That implication would have to be derived as part of a compositional meaning theory. We see no way this could happen (of course, Szabo might have an argument here that we are not aware of.)

We suspect there's deeper issue here connected to Szabo's follow up point. He imagines us saying that the reason why 'I have a headache' doesn't semantically express the proposition *that someone has a headache* is because it contains 'I', and this is a context sensitive expression, that the semantic theory will pick up on this, and hence, block the undesirable attribution of semantic content.

If this were our strategy, the question arises of how we are to identify the context sensitive expressions, and there, in Chapter 7, we appeal to various tests. Szabo thinks none of those tests is acceptable and that's the issue we take up next.

S#3: Szabo on Tests for Context Sensitivity, Proper Names and Binding

Szabo says that we hold the view that 'the only words that pass serious tests of context-sensitivity are the ones on Kaplan's list.' About this claim he says: 'This would move me if it were true. But I think it is not.'

Szabo makes a number of very quick points about our tests, again, we wish we had space for a fuller discussion. Our responses will have to be as brief as Szabo's comments:

Szabo on proper names: We didn't mean to take a stand on whether or not proper names are ambiguous (no argument in the book depends on it). If Szabo is right and they are not ambiguous (and not context sensitive), we would have to see the positive theory in order to decide if a serious problem lurks here. Absent a positive theory of how to treat proper names, it is hard to see exactly how this provides a challenge to the use we put our

tests. As we pointed out in General Comments #1, we don't think passing the tests is either necessary nor sufficient for being context sensitive, so it is perfectly compatible with our theory that some special story would have to be told about proper names, This is just to say that we would have to see Szabo's positive proposal in order to evaluate the result of running the tests on proper names.

Szabo on Binding, Embedding and Indirect Reporting Tests: Szabo says:

> As Cappelen and Lepore are well aware, a number of moderate contextualists believe that at least some context-sensitivity is due to a bindable variable in logical form. Expressions containing such variables obviously don't have their semantic values fixed under every embedding. Consequently, there is no compelling reason to believe that their semantic values don't change when they occur within a clausal complement of 'said', and they may well fail the inter-contextual disquotational indirect report despite being context-sensitive

Not only are we well aware of this, Chapter 5 of *IS* is, in its entirety, devoted to a discussion of this idea (focusing on Stanley and Szabo (1999)). Two points (we wish we had more space to elaborate, especially on the second point, which adds something to our discussion in the book):

1. For reasons we spell out in Chapter 5, we think the idea of variables hidden in LF (at least in the relevant cases) has counter-intuitive consequences and should be rejected.
2. Even if Szabo rejects our arguments to that effect (which he presumably does, though he doesn't tell us why), it would not help to establish his objection against our use of the indirect reporting tests. In *IS*, we formulate the tests by appeal to intuitions about sentences containing 'said that'. But we didn't need to do that. This is not a point we emphasized in *IS*, but we have become clearer on it later: All we need appeal to is intuitions about unembedded sentences in different contexts saying the same thing. So, we can, in this paper, say what Szabo said, by just saying it (without saying that we say it). Here's an example (what follows is a speech act performed by us): *We are aware that moderate contextualists believe that some context sensitivity is due to a bindable variable in logical form*. In the previous sentence we just said, in this context, what Szabo said in another. To do

that, and to trigger the intuition we did, we didn't need to embed that sentence within the scope of 'said that'. This as analogous to Kripke's response to Dummett's wide-scope account of rigidity. Kripke pointed out that we don't need to embed sentences in modal contexts to trigger intuitions about rigidity. We say the same about content sharing across contexts: We need only think about unembedded sentences and whether or not they say the same. The point we've just made, we take to be important and obviously in need of further elaboration and defense. We will have to leave that for another occasion.

Reply to Francois Recanati

Recanati's *Literal Meaning* (2004) has one central objection to the kind of view we call semantic minimalism (what Stanley, in a recent review of Recanati's book, calls *propositional syncretism*): Recanati argues, along with Carston (2002) and Stanley & King (2005), that the minimal proposition will, in Stanley's terms, be 'an idle wheel in an explanation of linguistic practice'. In Chapter 12, we respond to that challenge (we focus on the original version of the argument, found in early papers by Carston), and end with a reversal of that charge: it is Recanati's view that lacks psychological reality. Chapters 8 and 9 also directly object to the view Recanati advocates. In Chapter 8 we argue his view makes communication impossible and in Chapter 9 we argue it is internally inconsistent. So, there are a number of disagreements between Recanati and us it would be interesting to explore.

These issues are not, however, what Recanati chose to focus on in his reply. His central argument concerns tests we present in Chapter 7. He has, unfortunately, misunderstood their status and nature. He has also misunderstood their role in our overall argument. We're afraid most of our reply will take the form 'This isn't our view, see page….'. Given the substantive disagreements between Recanati and us, and given his interesting arguments for his view, we wish this exchange had been more substantive, but as it is, we're forced to reiterate our position and refer readers to relevant passages.

R#1. 'Cappelen and Lepore's book is addressed to their fellow minimalists'

Recanati correctly outlines our argument to the effect that there is a slippery slope from moderate to radical contextualism (in Chapters 3-5). In response to this argument he