nos cinco formas en que puede ser sostenido: la tesis sincrética, el cuasicontextualismo, la composición pragmática, la tesis del formato erróneo y el eliminativismo del significado. Teniendo en cuenta esto, si las ideas de Austin han de tener alguna relevancia dentro del debate contemporáneo entre literalismo y contextualismo, parece necesario mostrar a cuál de estas versiones del contextualismo deben asociarse los planteamientos de Austin. Esto es algo que Colomina no hace; razón por la cual no se aprecia con claridad de qué manera el trabajo de Austin puede contribuir a dicho debate. Al final queda la sensación de que el artículo de Colomina no aporta muchos elementos para la discusión entre literalistas y contextualistas, sino que, más bien, contribuye a la exégesis de la obra de Austin.

Finalmente, quiero resaltar que el artículo presenta una idea bastante interesante: que nuestra constitución como seres humanos puede desempeñar un rol en la determinación del significado de nuestras emisiones. Me parece que esta idea de algún modo se aproxima a tesis de filósofos más recientes (como Gareth Evans), según las cuales nuestras capacidades corporales son indispensables para determinar el significado de, por ejemplo, los enunciados que contienen demostrativos. Desafortunadamente, Colomina desarrolla muy poco esta idea, dejándola simplemente como una sugerencia, cuya función es mínima dentro de la argumentación general.

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Some Possible Problems in Vittorio Villa's Version of Relativism

In his paper "Relativism: A Conceptual Analysis", Vittorio Villa carries out an interesting analysis of the notion of *relativism*. He presents a way of understanding that notion in a manner that covers a great number of its variations, and also makes some considerations that make it possible to deal with the so-called *self-refuting* argument. In this text, I want to introduce some reflections about three crucial points of Villa's paper: his definition of *relativism*, his distinction between *single schemes* and *long-term background frameworks*, and his distinction between *environment* and *world*.

I am going to start with Villa's definition of *relativism* and its contrary, *absolutism*. For Villa, relativism is the position that claims that:

[A]ll the (strong versions) or at least a significant and large part (weak versions) of the criteria and beliefs of a cognitive, cultural, semantic, ethical or aesthetic, etc., character (according to the sphere referred to) *depend* on –

and therefore are related to– a context (which can be a paradigm, a culture, a language, etc.) chosen each time as a reference point; and this means that there is no position, point of view or parameter outside any context making it possible to effect a completely neutral evaluation of these elements, and therefore to make any affirmations in absolute terms. (173, my emphasis)

It is important to understand the nature of the term *depend* used by Villa to express the relation between things susceptible of being relative and the context with respect to which those things are relativized. Such nature can be clarified using Villa's conception of *absolutism,* understood as a position according to which "characteristics possessed by all those conceptions that deem it necessary to admit that a large part of the beliefs and the criteria mentioned above [in the definition of relativism] are *valid* independently of reference to a context" (Villa 173, my emphasis).

Since *relativism* and *absolutism* are treated as contrary terms, it is necessary to define them using notions from the same logical category. Therefore, since *absolutism* is understood through a normative notion –*valid*– the dependence affirmed in the definition of *relativism* must also be understood in normative terms. This could help to eschew the use of 'etc' in the definition of *relativism* and advance toward a general conception that defines those terms using the concept of *normativity*: the things that can be relativized are those susceptible of tracing normative relations. Following McDowell (1994 xi-xii), those things are representational ones. Thus, *relativism* and *absolutism*

can be understood as labels for claims regarding whether or not normative properties of representational structures (as being true, good or beautiful) are context-dependent. For instance, if we take a scientific theory and assume that that theory has a representational nature because it refers to the world for example, it would be necessary to assign normativity to it. The assigned normativity is usually truth, but more pragmatic normativities, such as *correctness* or *predictive power*, can also be counted as options. Thus, normative properties would be truth-values, and to be or not to be relativistic about scientific theories would mean to affirm or deny that truth or falsity is determined by the context within which the theory is given.

In any case, the important point in Villa's paper is his response to the self-refuting argument. The self-refuting argument can be reconstructed as follows: relativism claims that the normative properties of representational structures are context-dependent. However, a problem comes up when one asks if that claim is true or false (or any other proper normative property). If that question were understood in a relativistic manner, any given response would be relative to a specific context. In this case, relativism really would not have a point against absolutism, because there are possible contexts in which absolutism could be true. But, if it were understood in an absolutistic way, that is, accepting that there are absolute points of view, for instance, the point of view from which relativism is granted, it would be self-refuting.

Before analyzing Villa's counterargument, it can be interesting at least to enunciate a possibility that is not taken into count by Villa. Relativism (like absolutism) can be understood as belonging to the type of structure that John Searle (1998) calls the *Background*. Although this is not totally clear from Searle's presentation, the *Background* is the structure that underlines and configures the possibility of making affirmations, expressing meanings, and tracing intentionality relations. This implies that items belonging to the *Background* are not susceptible of being analyzed in terms of truth, significance, or intentionality. In the same way, *relativism* could be taken as a structure that makes possible normative evaluations and, therefore, it could not be subject to such evaluations, because it is presupposed in them. This would make it possible to avoid relativism's self-referentiality and, consequently, the possibility of self-refutation.

Villa's rejection of self-refuting argument starts out by denying that relativism can have a point against absolutism. For him, accepting relativism does not imply accepting that it can just be taken as relative to a particular context. For Villa, "[i]t should instead be possible, for a relativistic conception to defend its positions beyond its own boundaries and to find new followers" (180). That means that it is necessary to express relativistic conceptions in way that is comprehensible and translatable to different contexts and conceptual schemes (in other words, it is necessary that relativistic conceptions be *communicable* between different contexts). Furthermore, "[i]t should also be possi-ble to pass judgments in terms of greater or lesser explanatory correctness, if one really does not want to use the word truth, as concerns conceptual schemes, theories and visions of the world different than our own" (*ibid*.). That means that relativism must *also* have the possibility of allowing *normative evaluation* and comparison between different contexts and conceptual schemes. For Villa, in order for relativism to be able to satisfy those conditions it is necessary to identify some elements shared between contexts. But, in order not to make room for the self-refuting argument, those shared elements must be understood in a special way.

Villa explains the nature of such shared elements saying that "those elements are relative to schemes or cultures, but contingently [and not ne-cessarily] common to them all" (183). Furthermore, Villa claims that an ex-planation of how such a conception of shared elements is possible must obser-ve two restrictions: (1) explaining that the shared elements are given within contexts, and (2) explaining how it is possible to speak, from a relativistic po-sition, of an objective reality that serves as a common basis for all contexts. In order to explain that the shared ele-ments can satisfy the first restriction, Villa appeals to a distinction between *single schemes or cultures* (hereinaf-ter *singles*) and *long-term background frameworks* (hereinafter referred to as *frameworks*). That distinction is treated as gradual, determined by the scope of the conceptual picture involved, and encompassing even the notion of *culture of a civilization*. For Villa, the elements of a framework do not belong

to a sort of reality in itself; rather, they are the result of an interpretative and selective human action with respect to a world that is totally unaware.

Regarding that distinction, we must recall that it is necessary for a conception of relativism to make room for the possibility of communication and normative evaluation between contexts and conceptual schemes. As Villa complains, not doing so gives rise to a *quietistic*, sectarian, even unscratchable, relativism. But, perhaps, the singles-frameworks distinction does not provide a good explanation of inter-contextual communication and evaluation. These inter-contextual phenomena are explained by appealing to a wide framework that contains different contexts (including singles, more complex things, and even frameworks), allowing relations among them. But, since the difference between singles and frameworks is gradual and not one of type, appealing to a framework actually makes it possible to explain only communication within a framework, a very broad one, but still a framework. The problem is that the possibility of communication and evaluation within a framework, independently of whether it is a broad one, is not controversial. The real challenge is to explain the possibility of communication and normative evaluation among different contexts: contexts that are different in type. And if all differences among them are treated as differences in degree and not as differences in type, in the end there would be only one very broad context or conceptual scheme, thus making evident the problem of explaining inter-contextual commu-

nication and evaluation, given that the possibility of such things within the same context has not been called into question. Putting things in that way, Villa cannot even enunciate restriction (1) in an interesting way, because that restriction would be operating on the possibility of communication and normative evaluation in a case that has not been questioned, that is, within contexts. Thus, the question remains open as to whether Villa's model once again provides a *quietistic*, sectarian, and even unscratchable relativism, given that apparently relativism can only be constructed within a particular context that is broad yet still particular. In that sense, relativism would not admit the possibility of real differences among contexts.

On the other hand, in order to explain that the shared elements can satisfy the second restriction, Villa introduces the distinction between *environment* and *world*. *Environment* is defined as the common source of sensory inputs and the common reference point of non-verbal transactions and interactions. It only exists in a pre-linguistic manner and, therefore, is logically prior to every type of interaction. On the other hand, *world* is understood as an object of linguistic and/or theoretical interpretation. This implies that it is possible to speak of several words, that there are many versions of world. Again, there are some questions that could be asked about Villa's position. Here, I want to stress the way in which he seems to understand the nature of meaning, specifically the meaning of experience. According to his explanation, it is only

possible to speak of a meaningful world when the latter is the object of linguistic and/or theoretical interpretation. In other words, meaning exists only within a conceptually structured context, since language and theories are expressed using concepts. Villa locates the source of sensory inputs in the *environment* (and if his definitions are accurate, environment must be understood as a structure that lacks meaning). Thus, he seems to be proposing a two-step model for the relation between meaning and reality (including a possible meaning for experience): there is first a sensory stimulation lacking meaning (the relation to environment), and, secondly, *the birth* of meaning as the result of a conceptually structured interpretation of that sensory stimulation (the construction of a world). I will avoid the possible critiques that could be made on the basis of a theory of the non-conceptual content of experience[1] and suppose that Villa's conceptualistic position is justified, for example, by appealing to McDowell's arguments (1994). However, I find it problematic that his version of the birth of meaning in relation to reality has an uncomfortable resemblance to that naive version of a modern empiricist theory of meaning, described by Sellars (1956) as the myth of the given, a theory that has been discredited in the recent philosophy of mind, language and content. According to the myth of the given, the source of meaning and normativity is a purely natural or causal relation between subjects and reality, which

would provide them with raw materials (for example, sensory impacts or the empiricist version of ideas) devoid of meaning. As McDowell (1994) has pointed out, that model would imply the impossibility of explaining how experience can have justificatory relations to judgments.

Villa's distinction seems be able to explain why cross-contextual communication and normative evaluation are possible, by anchoring the source of meaning and normativity in a shared environment. But, perhaps, in doing so, he is committing to the problematic myth of the given, which would make it difficult to explain the justificatory role of experience with respect to judgments, a thesis that I suppose no one would reject in principle.

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1   Those critics can be founded in Cussins (147-159).