Persons, Eliminativism, and Context

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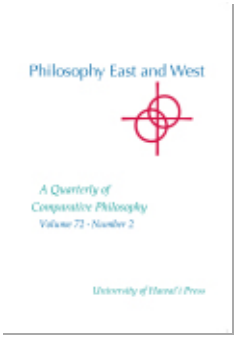

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Mark Siderits' *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy* is a rich and wide-ranging volume. It is an exercise in what Siderits calls "fusion philosophy," where the theoretical resources invented by one philosophical tradition are used to solve problems for another. The aim of this book, therefore, is to show how innovations in Buddhist philosophy in Sanskrit can help us make progress in contemporary debates about the nature of persons and personal identity. Here, I think, the book is a success. Not only has it opened up new possibilities within the theoretical space where these debates take place, but also it persuasively explains why these possibilities are worth taking seriously.

In a nutshell, the argument of the book is this. Let *realism* be the conjunction of two claims: (1) that there are fundamentally existent or ultimately real objects, that is, objects that are the basic, mind-independent constituents of reality, and (2) that there is a uniquely correct description of what fundamentally exists or how the world fundamentally is. In the first part (chapters 1–5), Siderits argues that if realism is true then the Buddhist reductionism about persons endorsed by Ābhidharmika Buddhists—roughly, the view that the concept "person" is only a convenient designator for causally connected chains of psychophysical elements—is the correct theory of persons. In the second part of the book (chapters 6–9), Siderits argues against realism: he endorses a kind of global anti-realism, traditionally associated with Mādhyamika Buddhists, which says that there cannot be a uniquely correct description of what fundamentally exists or how the world fundamentally is. If this view is right, neither our ordinary talk about persons nor Buddhist reductionism can be (context-invariantly) true.

This summary doesn't capture the range of original proposals that Siderits puts forward here. In what follows, I focus on two such proposals. The first is the claim that reductionists about persons should adopt a variety of *semantic dualism*—a distinction between ultimate truth and conventional truth—if they want to reconcile our ordinary discourse about persons with their commitment to reductionism. The second is that the Mādhyamika brand of global anti-realism that Siderits endorses is best understood as a kind of *semantic contextualism*, according to which truthmakers (and falsitymakers) for sentences can vary from one context to another. Both these proposals are worth exploring carefully. For the purposes of the present review, however, I will only raise some questions about them.

Before I begin, I want to emphasize that textual exegesis is not my concern. I shall not ask whether Siderits correctly interprets Buddhist texts. Instead, I shall independently assess Siderits' arguments for the positions he defends. Here is how I shall proceed. First, I will consider whether we should prefer Buddhist reductionism to other anti-realist views about persons. Then I will consider if the version of semantic contextualism that Siderits defends is compatible with global anti-realism. Finally, I shall explore the relationship between this kind of semantic contextualism and the kind of epistemic contextualism that he endorses in another part of the book.

I. Realism, Reductionism, and Semantic Dualism

To understand what Siderits means by "Buddhist reductionism," it might be worth re-drawing a distinction that he makes among *realism*, *reductionism*, and *eliminativism* (pp. 9–19).

Realists about a kind K would say that instances of K are fundamentally existent, that is, are part of the basic furniture of the world. For example, a realist about composite objects would claim that composite objects like chariots and carts are distinct from their parts in relation and should be treated as fundamentally existent objects in the same sense as their parts. By contrast, a reductionist about a kind K would deny that instances of K are fundamentally existent. Rather, they would assert that the existence of instances of K just consists in the existence of more basic, fundamentally existent objects of some other kind. For example, a reductionist about composite objects, say a mereological nihilist, would claim that the existence of composite objects like chariots and carts consists in nothing over and above the existence of their parts arranged chariot- or cart-wise. Thus, a reductionist about a kind K embraces a form of local anti-realism about that kind, because they deny the fundamental existence of the instances of the relevant kind.

Eliminativism can come in two varieties: *entity eliminativism* and *discourse eliminativism*.[1] Like the reductionist, an entity eliminativist about a kind K would say that instances of K are not fundamentally existent. But they would not accept the reductionist's claim that the existence of K-instances consists simply in the existence of more basic, fundamentally existent objects. For example, take the case of witches. The very concept of a witch carries the false presupposition that people can have magical powers. Since the existence of witches would require the existence of magical powers, the existence of witches cannot simply boil down to the existence of other more basic, fundamentally existent objects as in the case of chariots and carts. So, we have to be entity eliminativists, rather than reductionists, about witches. By contrast, a discourse eliminativist about a kind K does not make the claim that instances of K do not (fundamentally or

otherwise) exist, but rather says that we should stop talking about instances of K altogether. So, a discourse eliminativist about witches would ask us not to use the word "witch" in our ordinary (or scientific) discourse.

The important thing to note is simply that entity eliminativism does not entail discourse eliminativism. For example, I can think that numbers do not exist at all, without committing myself to the claim that we should stop talking about numbers. To see why, consider the following sentence:

1. The number of planets in the solar system is eight.

Suppose we are entity eliminativists about numbers: we think that numbers are not fundamentally existent, and that their existence does not consist in the existence of other more basic objects. Since (1) presupposes or entails that there are numbers, it is either false or lacks a truth-value. Yet we can coherently persist in talking (and thinking) as if there are numbers, because that way of talking (and thinking) is simply a convenient way of asserting (or believing) weaker truths about the world. For example, the claim that the number of planets is eight entails several weaker but strictly true claims about the solar system, which would be much more cumbersome to state without talking about numbers.

With these distinctions in mind, let us turn to Buddhist reductionism. This is simply the claim that the expression or concept "person" simply picks out certain causally connected psychophysical elements—the body and the accompanying mental and physical events—that are ordinarily taken to be constituents of a person. On the one hand, this view is incompatible with the realist view that persons are compositionally irreducible inner subjects or selves, who serve as the bearers of physical and mental properties, but are distinct from them. On the other hand, it is incompatible with an entity eliminativist view, according to which persons are, like witches, purely fictional objects that cannot be reduced to any fundamentally existent objects. It should be obvious that Buddhist reductionism presupposes a broader form of realism: the view that there are fundamentally existent objects such as the psychophysical elements that persons are made of, and that there is a correct description of how the world fundamentally is (which does not include any reference to persons).

In chapter 1, Siderits argues that Buddhist reductionists have an advantage over other reductionists about persons. Reductionists like Parfit (1987, p. 223) want to preserve the claim that persons are distinct from their bodies and their brains as well as the mental and physical events that accompany them. But their reductionism also seems to commit them to the view that the existence of persons consists in the existence of just those psychophysical elements. So, it is hard to see how both these claims could be true. According to Siderits, Buddhist reductionists can avoid this problem, because they accept a distinction between *ultimate* and *conventional truth*.

Roughly speaking, a sentence is conventionally true just in case believing its content or asserting it is practically useful; a sentence is ultimately true just in case it reflects how the world fundamentally and objectively is.

Apply this distinction to the two claims that reductionists seem to accept. First, take the claim that persons are distinct from the psychological elements that constitute them. While this may be conventionally true, it is not ultimately true. Since it falsely presupposes (or entails) the existence of persons, the claim cannot be ultimately true. Next, consider the claim that persons are just the psychophysical elements that constitute them. This claim is neither conventionally true nor ultimately true. It is not conventionally true because it conflicts with the practical interests that underwrite our ordinary convention of treating ourselves and other persons as distinct from our bodies, mental states, and so forth. It is also not ultimately true because, given that persons are not basic constituents of reality, a claim that presupposes (or entails) their existence cannot be ultimately true. So, Buddhist reductionists avoid the problem for reductionists like Parfit by rejecting the view that both claims can be ultimately or conventionally true together. In Siderits' final analysis, Buddhist reductionism should not be stated as a claim about what persons are. Rather, it is a semantic claim about how the expression "person" is used: namely, that the expression "person" is a convenient designator for a causally connected series of psychophysical elements. This claim can be ultimately true, because it only captures a fact about how we use language.

My question is this: do we have any good reason to prefer Buddhist reductionism to entity eliminativism about persons? Take, for example, the following argument:

P1. The ordinary concept of a person carries false presuppositions: for example, the presupposition that there is an enduring entity that persists for sufficiently long stretches of time and is distinct from physical and mental states, but serves as the bearer of such states across time.
P2. Any concept that carries false presuppositions cannot pick out any kind of fundamentally existent object or collections of such objects.
C. The ordinary concept of person cannot pick out any kind of fundamentally existent object or collections of such objects.

P2 can be supported by the same kind of reasoning that underwrote our reasoning about witches. P1 can be motivated as follows. We have independent reasons for thinking that there is no enduring entity that persists for sufficiently long stretches of time and is distinct from physical and mental states, but serves as the bearer of such states across time. Why? If there is no inner self (as Siderits argues in chapter 2), then it is unclear whether the body itself, or a part of it, or the causally connected physical and mental events that accompany it, can play the role of a person.

First of all, it seems that persons can persist through changes that a body or any part of the body itself cannot survive. To see this, think simply of Parfit's (1987) teleportation cases: a person steps into a Star Trek–style teletransporter, their body is destroyed, and a molecule-for-molecule replica of their body is created at the next instant on another planet. If we intuitively take teletransportation to be a form of travel, then a person cannot be identical to the body or a part of it. For, in the course of teletransportation, the body is destroyed but the person continues to exist.

Second, if the person is simply a series of physical and mental events, such a series cannot be treated as an enduring bearer of mental and bodily states that is distinct from such states. This is because if mereological nihilism is true, then the series is simply a multiplicity of short-lived physical and mental events. So, the natural conclusion is that our belief in the existence of persons is just as much an artifact of a false conception of the world as was our erstwhile belief in the existence of witches.

Why, then, does Siderits reject entity eliminativism about persons? As far as I can see, it is because he thinks that entity eliminativists about persons typically accept a form of discourse eliminativism about persons. He writes:

> Now an eliminativist may or may not have in mind some replacement for the theory that is, in their eyes, so thoroughly discredited. In the medical case, the eliminativist about demons proposes that that theory be replaced by the microbial infection theory. But in the philosophy of mind, the eliminative materialist, who advocates scrapping so-called folk psychology, has no concrete replacement theory to offer, and merely gestures in the direction of future neuroscience. So the Eliminativist need not propose any new account to replace our current manner of conceptualizing persons. But Eliminativism is often portrayed as involving the proposal that we replace our conception of persons with something far more ephemeral, the person-stage. (p. 24)

As Siderits notes, the problem for discourse eliminativists of this sort is that person-stages are not the sort of enduring entities that persons are supposed to be. Therefore, they cannot be objects of various self- and other-directed attitudes—like future-directed self-concern, regret, praise, and blame—which we adopt towards persons. So, if we accept discourse eliminativism, we would not only have to revise the vocabulary using which we talk about ourselves and others, but we would also have to give up many of our ordinary practices, like our practices of holding each other responsible for our actions, our practices of making plans for our own future well-being, and so on. And this may not be practically feasible.

I agree that discourse eliminativists about persons might face this problem. But, as we know, an entity eliminativist about persons does not have to be a discourse eliminativist about persons. Consider the following sentence:

2. After the accident, Phineas Gage was no longer the same person.

If persons do not exist at all, this sentence is either strictly false or not true. But an entity eliminativist might say that we should continue to assert sentences like (2), because such sentences entail other weaker truths about the relevant series of physical and mental events. These truths though in principle expressible—would be too difficult to state otherwise.

The kind of entity eliminativisim I am imagining can explain why it is practically useful for us to speak or think as if there are persons that are distinct from causally connected series of psychophysical elements, even though there are no such persons. Philosophers sometimes distinguish between *full* and *partial truth*.[2] For example:

3. Jo cooked pasta on May 1, 2021.

Suppose Jo didn't cook pasta on May 1, 2021, but she did cook some curry. So, (3) is strictly false, but could still be partially true about some other closely connected subject-matter, like the subject-matter of whether Jo cooked something on May 1, 2021. Analogously, if entity eliminativism is true, sentences like "After the accident, Phineas Gage was no longer the same person" are either false or without a truth-value. But such sentences could still be partially true in relation to other closely connected subject-matters, like the subject-matter of how things stand with respect to the stream of causally connected psychophysical elements that we associate with Phineas Gage. This, in turn, might explain why it is practically useful to assert such sentences and believe their contents. Since such sentences are partially true, asserting such sentences could still convey true information. Similarly, since one's beliefs about the contents of such sentences would be partially true, acting on such beliefs could still lead to practical success.

Thus, both the Buddhist reductionist and the entity eliminativist share the same explanatory advantage. Reductionists can claim that our thoughts or assertions about persons are practically useful, because our concept or expression "person" picks out certain causally connected psychological elements and thus allows us to indirectly track certain ultimate truths. By contrast, entity eliminativists can claim that our thoughts or claims about persons are practically useful, because they are partially true about certain causally connected psychological elements and thus also allow us to track certain truths *tout court*.

If the distinction between full and partial truth works, entity eliminativists do not need to accept the kind of semantic dualism that Buddhist reductionists accept. After all, this kind of semantic dualism seems costly. It complicates our semantics by introducing (at least) two truth-predicates, one for conventional truth and the other for ultimate truth. Moreover, it requires a degree of semantic insulation between sentences that are conventionally true and those that are ultimately true. As Siderits notes (p. 191), a sentence that is ultimately true need not be conventionally true or false, and,

similarly, a sentence that is conventionally true need not be ultimately true or false. Entity eliminativists don't need to make use of this kind of machinery. In the entity eliminativist's preferred semantics for natural language, there can simply be one truth-predicate. Using that truth-predicate, they can define the notions of full and partial truth. They can then say that sentences about persons are never fully true, but that doesn't prevent them from being partially true. So, it is unclear why we should be reductionists rather than entity eliminativists about persons.

II. Contextualism and Anti-Realism

The second part of Siderits' book (especially chapters 6–8) develops a kind of global anti-realism broadly inspired by Mādhyamika thought. Global anti-realism is a semantic thesis: the thesis that the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth, that is, that there is no uniquely correct description of how the world fundamentally is.[3] What happens to Buddhist reductionism once we embrace global anti-realism? There are two possible answers.

First, the global anti-realist could argue that any reductive analysis of concepts like "person" or "ordinary object" fails to be true (or is at least misleading), because any such reductive analysis falsely presupposes that there is a correct description of how the world fundamentally and objectively is. However, according to Siderits, if the global anti-realist adopts this strategy, it will be hard for them to explain why we should take the Buddhist doctrine of nonself seriously (p. 192).[4] Unless they can argue that a self or a person cannot be found among the fundamental constituents of reality, they cannot explain why we should reject the fundamental existence of a self or a person. But, in order to argue in that way, they do have to accept that certain objects—for example, the psychophysical elements that constitute us—are fundamentally existent.

This brings us to the second answer, the answer that Siderits actually gives (pp. 196 ff.). To preserve the truth of reductive analyses of concepts like "person," the global anti-realist could adopt a form of *semantic contextualism*. Standard forms of semantic contextualism entail either that the meaning of some class of expressions varies depending on the context of speech, or that the truth-conditions of a certain class of sentences vary depending on the context of speech. The version of semantic contextualism that Siderits defends is slightly different: it is the view that, for any sentence of a given language, what explains why the sentence is true or false—its truthmakers and its falsitymakers—can vary depending on the context. Call this *truthmaker contextualism*.

Here is one way of explaining the idea. Within any context of speech, the participants in that context will assume that the world is fundamentally and objectively a certain way. So, they will accept that certain objects are fundamentally existent (or, as the Mādhyamika would put it, possess intrinsic

nature or *svabhāva*) while other objects are not (or do not possess intrinsic nature or *svabhāva*). Those objects—or facts involving those objects—can serve as truthmakers or falsitymakers for any sentence in that context. For example, in ordinary contexts of conversation, given our practical interests, we may treat composite objects like chariots and tables as fundamentally existent. In such contexts, a sentence like "There's a table in the next room" can indeed be made true simply by facts involving composite objects like tables and chairs. Nothing further might be required. However, this context might shift when we begin considering arguments in favor of mereological nihilism. In the new context, composite objects like tables and chairs can no longer be treated as fundamentally existent. Thus, in that context, facts about them can no longer serve as truthmakers or falsitymakers for sentences. In this new context, sentences like "There's a table in the next room" cannot be made true (or false) by facts about tables. Rather, it would be true (or false) by virtue of facts about particles arranged tablewise. A reductive analysis of the concept "person" in terms of more basic psychophysical elements may indeed be true in that context. So, in that context, the Buddhist reductionist teaching of nonself will be correct. Yet, this may leave open the possibility of further context shifts that create new contexts where even these psychophysical elements do not count as fundamentally existent.

The upshot is simply this: if truthmaker contextualism is true, there is no context-independently true description of how the world fundamentally and objectively is. This is incompatible with realism insofar as the realists are committed to the idea that there is a uniquely correct description of the way that the world fundamentally is.

It is not immediately clear to me whether this kind of truthmaker contextualism is genuinely compatible with global anti-realism. Typically, in natural-language semantics and pragmatics, two distinct conceptions of context are discussed. According to one conception, the context is a concrete situation where a discussion is taking place at a certain time. For example, when people say that demonstratives like "this" or "that" are context-sensitive, it is this notion of context that they often have in mind. They want to say that certain extramental features of the concrete situation that the speaker finds themself in—for example the speaker's gestures—determine what these demonstratives refer to.[5] According to the other conception, the context is an evolving body of background information—the common ground—which is shared by the participants in a conversation. For example, when people say that an assertion will have a point only if it contributes some information that was previously unavailable in the relevant context, what they have in mind is this notion of context as a shared body of background information.[6]

It seems to me that the latter conception of context, and not the former, would be more suitable for Siderits' purposes. For, on Siderits' view, what counts as the truthmaker or the falsitymaker for a sentence in a context of

speech depends on the assumptions shared by the participants in that conversation about which objects fundamentally exist. Thus, Siderits' truthmaker contextualism will simply be the view that what makes a sentence true or false varies depending on the context, which—in this case—is simply a background picture of the world that the participants in the relevant discussion perhaps unquestioningly accept.

If this is right, then there is a problem. Standardly, anyone who endorses this kind of contextualism will be committed to the existence of mental states—like acceptance—that are necessary to explain how certain pieces of information are shared among the participants in a conversation. So, my question is simply this: how does Siderits' global anti-realist avoid committing themselves to the existence of such mental states? In response, the global anti-realist could point out that they do not think such mental states are themselves fundamentally existent or exist depending on other more fundamental objects, because there are certain contexts where such states do not count as fundamentally existent and are not reducible to other things that are fundamentally existent. But that reply seems unstable. For, in appealing back to contextualism, the global anti-realist will be implicitly invoking the mental states of the participants in that conversation. So, the worry is that global anti-realism is not compatible with at least one kind of semantic contextualism that Siderits could be defending.

III. Truthmaker Contextualism and Epistemic Contextualism

Truthmaker contextualism entails epistemic contextualism. Consider the following knowledge-ascription:

4. Sue knows that there is a table in the next room.

If knowledge requires belief, then (4) implies that Sue believes that there is a table in the next room. In a context where tables do not count as fundamentally existent (or cannot be reduced to anything that is fundamentally existent), Sue's belief cannot be fully true. So, by the factivity of the verb "knows," we end up with the conclusion that (4) is false. By contrast, in a context where tables do count as fundamentally existent, Sue's belief can be true, and, provided that other conditions for knowledge are fulfilled, the knowledge-ascription may come out true. So, truthmaker contextualism entails the view that the truth-conditions for knowledge-ascriptions vary depending on the context of speech.

More generally, this kind of epistemic contextualism implies that a belief-forming mechanism that counts as a source of knowledge in one context may not count as a source of knowledge in another. Take visual perception. Visual perception can only provide us knowledge about middle-sized material objects. But if composite objects do not fundamentally exist

or cannot be reduced to fundamentally existent objects, then sensory perception cannot count as a source of knowledge about mind-independent material objects. Thus, in a context where such objects cannot be treated as fundamentally existent or are not reducible to any fundamentally existent objects, ascriptions of perceptual knowledge about mind-independent material objects will come out false.

Arguably, this kind of epistemic contextualism can help us escape a form of skepticism that realism makes room for. Since the realist asserts that there are fundamental truths about the world, they (pragmatically) imply that they have certain methods of knowing—for example, perception and inference—that provide access to the fact that the world is a certain way fundamentally. But, as the skeptic would tell us, there is no way of demonstrating that a method of belief-formation counts as a means of knowing, without making substantive background assumptions about the world as well as the reliability of our basic belief-forming mechanisms. The Mādhyamika Buddhists bring out this problem by posing a trilemma for Nyāya realists (which Siderits reconstructs in chapter 7).

Suppose there is a finite number of methods by which we can gain knowledge about how the world fundamentally is. Let these be M_1, M_2, M_3, . . . , M_n. Then, the existence of these methods is proved either (1) without relying on any method of knowing at all, or (2) by relying on some method M_i that is on this list, or (3) by relying on some method M_i that does not appear on this list. If the existence of these methods of knowing could be proved without relying on any method at all, the same should be said about other objects of knowledge like a pot. But that is implausible: we require methods of knowing to prove the existence of such objects. Second, if we rely on some method M_i that appears on the list, then there will be a problem of epistemic circularity: we will be using a certain method to prove its own existence. Third, if we rely on some method M_i that doesn't appear on the list, then we will have to posit a distinct method of knowing to prove the existence of the methods on the list. Then, in order to prove the existence of that other method M_i, we would need to appeal to another method M_j. This will lead to an infinite regress. What this trilemma shows is that the realist's knowledge-claims pave the way for skepticism.

This skeptical challenge is powerful. A realist might respond to this argument in two different ways. First, we could argue (as Mīmāṃsakas do) that we don't need to rely on any distinct method of knowing (over and above our method of introspection) for the purposes of ascertaining that we have gained knowledge by a certain method. As long as there is no defeating evidence that suggests that the relevant belief is defective or erroneous, we are entitled to conclude that it constitutes or yields knowledge. Second, we could embrace a form of epistemic circularity (as Naiyāyikas do), and claim that we can harmlessly rely on token applications

of methods like perception and inference in order to know that other applications of these very methods yield knowledge.

The first move lines up with an entitlement-driven view about warrant, a view on which, at least in some cases, we are warranted to believe that our basic belief-forming mechanisms are functioning reliably or warrant as long as we have no reason to suspect otherwise.[7] The second move is similar to a reliabilist response to skeptical arguments. According to this reply, to the extent that our belief-forming mechanisms are in fact reliable, they can provide us evidence on the basis of which we could know that they themselves are functioning reliably.[8] Both moves are problematic. The first entitlement-driven view contradicts an evidentialist account of rationality—the view that a belief is epistemically rational or warranted just in case it is supported by sufficient evidence. The second reliabilist view faces the problem of epistemic bootstrapping insofar as it allows people to gain knowledge (in a questionable and counterintuitive manner) about the reliability of their belief-forming mechanisms by using these very mechanisms.[9]

I agree with Siderits that the right response to this problem is to embrace a form of epistemic contextualism. According to my preferred form of epistemic contextualism, the truth-conditions of knowledge-ascriptions vary depending on the context of speech. This yields a simple solution to the skeptical problem. In any context, we are typically working with a number of default assumptions about what the world is like, what the epistemic credentials of basic methods of belief-formation are, and so on. So, when we are evaluating the epistemic situation of an agent, these assumptions determine the epistemic standards by which we assess the agent. For example, in an ordinary context, we assume that the world is populated by composite objects like tables and chairs, and that our basic belief-forming mechanisms such as perception are reliable. In such a context, many of our mundane knowledge-ascriptions will be true and can be *shown* to be true in light of these background assumptions. But, if we jettison our ordinary conception of what the world is like, or if we take skeptical possibilities seriously, the context will shift. In the new context, we can no longer rely on these assumptions when it comes to epistemically evaluating ourselves or other agents. In such contexts, therefore, many of our mundane knowledge-ascriptions will come out false.

What Siderits means by "epistemic contextualism" is less clear. There are at least two places where some clarification would be nice. The first has to do with the statement of contextualism. Semantic versions of epistemic contextualism claim either that expressions like "knows" and "is justified in believing" are context-sensitive (i.e., they refer to different sets of cognitive relations in different contexts), or that the truth-conditions of ascriptions of knowledge and justification are context-sensitive. Here, I have adopted the second formulation of epistemic contextualism. By contrast, Siderits doesn't

seem to accept any semantic version of epistemic contextualism. He seems to take epistemic contextualism to be a claim about relations of justification; namely, the relations of justification or evidential support—that is, the relations that determine what evidence justifies which belief—differ depending on the context (pp. 175–176). This seems a bit arbitrary without further motivation.

A second (and more significant) bit of unclarity pertains to the notion of context itself. Whose context are we talking about? In a number of passages, Siderits seems to presuppose that it is the context of the inquirer, that is, the subject who engages in an inquiry and forms beliefs about various subject-matters.[10] By contrast, I have been assuming that it is the context of speech, that is, the context shared by the ascribers of knowledge, who may be the inquirers in some cases but need not be. The first notion of context goes hand in hand with a variety of subject-sensitive invariantism, according to which whether a subject counts as knowing something varies depending on the features of the subject's cognitive and practical situation, but the truth-conditions of knowledge-ascriptions do not vary depending on the context of speech once these features have been fixed. By contrast, the second notion of context fits with my semantic version of epistemic contextualism, the view that the truth-conditions of knowledge-ascriptions can vary depending on the context of speech even after all the features of the subject's cognitive and practical situation have been fixed.

Obviously, these two kinds of epistemic contextualism will yield different predictions. Moreover, the semantic version of epistemic contextualism that I prefer nicely coheres with the more general form of semantic contextualism—what I was calling truthmaker contextualism—that Siderits endorses elsewhere in the book. But it is not clear to me how Siderits' preferred form of inquirer-relative epistemic contextualism fits with that kind of semantic contextualism. So, my question is simply this: from the standpoint of the global anti-realist, is there any good reason to prefer inquirer-relative epistemic contextualism to the semantic version of epistemic contextualism that I like?

IV. Conclusion

In this review, I have tried to argue for three claims. First, there is no clear reason for us to prefer Buddhist reductionism to a kind of entity eliminativism about persons, which incorporates a distinction between full and partial truth. Second, global anti-realism is not obviously compatible with the kind of truthmaker contextualism that Siderits prefers. Third, if the global anti-realist wants to avoid a form of skepticism that seems to follow from realism, the more coherent option for them is to accept a semantic version of epistemic contextualism according to which truth-conditions of knowledge-ascriptions vary depending on the context of speech. These claims need not, and should not, be construed as decisive objections against

Siderits' claims in this book. My hope is that, by thinking through these issues, we will end up with a better grip on Siderits' views, and will therefore be able to move the discussion forward on our own.

Notes

1 – For the distinction between two kinds of eliminativism, see Irvine and Sprevak 2020.

2 – The distinction between full truth and partial truth can be explained in a number of ways; for discussion, see Ullian and Goodman 1977, da Costa and French 2003, Humberstone 2003, Elgin 2004, and Yablo 2014.

3 – For an explanation, see pp. 159–161. Siderits' argument for this version of global anti-realism goes as follows (chap. 6). If, ultimately, there were some ultimate truth, then such a truth could obtain only by virtue of there being some fundamentally existent object that is the bearer of an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), that is, a nature that is independent of other things. But the notion of such a fundamentally existent object is marred by contradictions. Therefore, ultimately, there is no ultimate truth. To motivate the second premise of this argument, Siderits offers at least two considerations. First, the distinction between an intrinsic nature and its bearer doesn't make sense. Second, the notion of a fundamentally existent object with an intrinsic nature makes it hard for us to explain how change and causation are possible. I am not sure that a hard-nosed realist will be convinced by these arguments. There are number of options available here for the realist. They could argue that neither change nor causal relations are part of how the world fundamentally is, and they could accept some other picture of fundamentally existent objects that does not require us to make a distinction between intrinsic natures and their bearers. Since an investigation of such proposals will take us too far afield, I shall set them aside for the purposes of this review.

4 – To be fair, Siderits makes this point in the context of discussing a deflationist account of truth, but the point applies here.

5 – This is the notion of context that authors like Kaplan (1989) and Lewis (1980) have in mind when they are talking about the referents of demonstratives.

6 – For this notion of context, see Stalnaker 1978, 2002.

7 – An example of this sort of view is found in Wright 2004.

8 – See, e.g., Van Cleve's (1984) response to Humean skepticism about induction.

9 – For discussion of this problem, see Vogel 2000.

10 – See p. 180, where Williams (1991) seems to be favorably quoted.

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