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IS MEANING HOLISM COMPATIBLE WITH SEMANTIC MINIMALISM?

Summary: Meaning Holism and Contextualism are standardly acknowledged to be similar relativistic theories that often lead to similar troubles, in particular to issues concerning instability. On the other hand, the main rival of Contextualism, which is Minimalism, is taken to be resistant to these problems. In effect, it seems inevitable to see Meaning Holism and Minimalism as natural enemies. In my paper, I attempt to reject such a view. My argumentation consists of three main parts. First, I argue that Minimalism does not differ that much from Meaning Holism with respect to the instability issues as it also faces some of them (although in a slightly different way from the case of Holism of Contextualism). Second, I put forward several arguments to show that in fact Minimalism is not incompatible with the two versions of Meaning Holism I distinguish, namely Global Holism and Local Holism. I argue that a meaning holist has to accept some not uncontroversial principles to become an anti-minimalist – and vice versa. Finally, I demonstrate that Minimalism and Meaning Holism can be reconciled. Such a possibility occurs when something I called 'purely semantic processes' is allowed. The role of these processes is, roughly speaking, to protect literal meanings from being affected by strong pragmatic factors.

Keywords: meaning holism, contextualism, minimalism, local holism, global holism, instability, context sensitivity, literal meaning, pragmatic processes

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INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this paper is to make the initial move in the process of rejuvenating the theory of Meaning Holism.[1] In particular, I am going to figure out what is the location of Meaning Holism (MH) on the map of today's theories in the philosophy of language. In recent years the philosophical reflection of language has been dominated by the problem of context influence upon semantic content. The two main paradigms in this dispute are Contextualism and Minimalism. The common opinion is that MH and Contextualism – as they both rest on the relativistic foundations – stay in some tight theoretical relations and support each other. Consequently, it appears that there is no other option than to consider MH and the chief rival of Contextualism, i.e. Minimalism, as enemies that exclude each other. I am going to argue that this common opinion is wrong[2] and the alleged kinship between MH and Contextualism is in fact much more distant than it is supposed to be. Furthermore, I am going to offer arguments for the claim that MH and Minimalism are in fact compatible. *Summa summarum*, I am going to present MH from a new perspective which, as I believe, makes the theory more attractive.

The crucial point in judging what is the relation between MH and Minimalism is to make clear what the two theories hold. It is also not the easiest point to discuss, as both theories have several formulations which differ significantly. Since in Kawczyński (2018) I presented a wider picture of what MH is, on the one hand, and how the Contextualism-Minimalism debate looks like, on the other, here I will restrain myself to the nuts and bolts of the issue.

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[1] The theory slipped to oblivion a few years ago – largely due to the severe criticism offered by Fodor and Lepore (1992).

[2] In Kawczyński (2018) I offer argumentation against such a standpoint and I show that MH is logically independent of any version of Contextualism i.e. although it is compatible with most of them, it neither entails, nor is entailed by any. Discussed in this paper will be the other side of the coin i.e. the relation between MH and Minimalism, which is theoretically independent of the previous analysis although they complement each other.

1. THE THEORIES

1.1 MEANING HOLISM

MH can be characterised in several ways. I guess that when there are doubts concerning the definition of some theory, the first thing a philosopher usually does is checking the appropriate entry of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; hence, let us look how the theory in question is defined there by Henry Jackman:

The label "meaning holism" is generally applied to views that treat the meanings of all of the words in a language as interdependent. Meaning holism is typically contrasted with *atomism* about meaning (where each word's meaning is independent of every other word's meaning), and *molecularism* about meaning (where a word's meaning is tied to the meanings of some comparatively small subset of other words in the language [...] (Jackman 2017: §1)[3]

What Jackman actually characterises is the holistic *rule* for meaning, not any particular theory of meaning. The rule can be applied to various sets of semantic axioms and thus output different semantic theories. Since I do not want to commit myself to any particular theory of meaning, I am going to consider something I call (*Meaning*) *Holism as a Principle*:

(H-PRINCIPLE) MEANING OF A SINGLE EXPRESSION DEPENDS ON MEANINGS OF ALL OTHER EXPRESSIONS IN A GIVEN LINGUISTIC SYSTEM.

I believe the H-Principle reflects the general idea of the holistic account of language. I would like to emphasise that it is *merely* a principle, not a *theory*, and as such it can be reconciled with various *theories* regarding meaning.[4] Since I want the principle to stay as broad as possible, I am not going to try to make it more precise. Instead, I would like to draw the distinction between two possible versions of MH distinguished with regard to what is defined as the *linguistic system* mentioned in the principle. When applied to whole languages,

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[3] For an in-depth analysis of different possible formulations of MH I recommend Pagin (2006) and Peacocke (1997).

[4] Actually, even the word "meaning" appearing in the above formulation of the pronciple is broader than I would like it to be. Depending on what subject matter the principle is applied to, "meaning" can be interpreted as e.g. semantic significance, semantic value, character, content, or even representational properties.

the H-Principle yields the account I call *Global Holism*, according to which meaning of every linguistic item in a given language depends on meanings of all other linguistic items of the language. The thesis of Global Holism could be thus worked out as the claim that *literal meanings* are constituted / defined / formatted[5] in a holistic way.[6] On the other hand, *Local Holism*[7] is the theory which stems from applying the H-Principle to a given part of language, in particular to a single sentence or to a speech act or an utterance.[8] That leads to the view that all words occurring in a sentence, an utterance, a speech act etc. are associated in the way that the meaning of every word depends on the meanings of all other words.[9] Shortly speaking, according to Local Holism *meanings-in-contexts* behave holistically. Simplifying it slightly, it might be said that Global Holism concerns meanings of *types*, while Local Holism regards meanings of *tokens*.[10] In the later sections I examine in what relation Minimalism stands in these two versions of MH.

1.2 MINIMALISM

As we get to define Minimalism it is good to start with mentioning that how the borderline between Minimalism and Contextualism goes is in itself a challenging question without a good answer to date.[11]

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[5] I use the word "formatted" just as it is used in the debate between Contextualists and Minimalists; see e.g. Récanati (2004, p. 140–141).

[6] Global Holism may be understood as the *metasemantic* account according to which meaning (or more generally: semantic significance) is assigned to linguistic items in a holistic way i.e. in a given language each [assignment of] meaning depends on every other [asssignment of] meaning.

[7] The terms "Global Holism" and "Local Holism" may be found in the literature about holism (e.g. see: Peacocke 1997; Penco 2001) but they have not earned fixed meaning or reference so far.

[8] But it could be a *set* of utterances, speech acts, sentences etc. as well, so for instance, it might be said that the whole monologue or a scientific theory are holistic in the sense provided by the H-Principle.

[9] Analogously to what has been said about Global Holism, Local Holism may be seen as the *semantic* theory which says that semantic values of linguistic items – the values that are their contributions to truth-conditions of relevant sentences – are determined holistically.

[10] Another approximation could be that Global Holism deals with Kaplanian *character*, while Local Holism with *content*.

[11] As pointed by Joanna Odrowąż-Sypniewska (2013, p. 65–70) there are four possible criteria of the division and being classified as a contextualist according to one of them does not guarantee being such classified according to another.

However, basing on the definitions offered by several prominent philosophers taking part in the dispute[12] we can draw the conclusion that in general being a minimalist consists of accepting conjointly the two following theses:

(M1) Intuitive propositional content of a well-formed sentence is never determined by the strong pragmatic effects.

(M2) Class of natural language context-sensitive expressions overlaps with the set of obviously indexical expressions (i.e. than the "Kaplan's set") or is insignificantly bigger than it, i.e. there is *not many* context-sensitive expressions.[13]

For the sake of precision, let me say that the intuitive propositional content is *propositional* because it has truth-value and it is *intuitive* because it is distinguished from the *literal* content – e.g. the notorious sentence "The table is covered with books" may be regarded as expressing the literal russellian proposition (i.e. that there exists exactly one table and it is covered with books) and the intuitive proposition that there is a particular table (not necessarily the only table in the universe) that is covered with books.[14] The best way to explain what the strong pragmatic effects are is to give the floor to Jeffrey King and Jason Stanley who have introduced the notion:

A weak pragmatic effect on what is communicated by an utterance is a case in which context (including speaker intentions) determines interpretation of a lexical item in accord with the standard meaning of that lexical item. A strong pragmatic effect on what is communicated is a contextual effect on what is communicated that is not merely pragmatic in the weak sense. (King, Stanley 2005/2007, p. 140)

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[12] I rely in particular on: Bach 2005; Borg 2004; 2012, p. 4–5; Cappelen, Lepore 2005, p. 143–145; Récanati 2004; 2010; Stanley 2007.

[13] Such a standpoint excludes from the group of minimalists the philosopher who pronounces himself to be a "radical minimalist", namely Kent Bach, who rejects so called *propositionalism* i.e. the claim that every well-formed sentence expresses a proposition. However, there are good reasons for doing it this way – in particular, I find Récanati's (2010, 12–14) arguments for the thesis that the only reasonable version of minimalism is the one that assumes propositionalism to be pretty convincing. For further discussion on Bach's place in the debate see Odrowąż-Sypniewska (2013, p. 73–74).

[14] For the wider explanation of what the intuitive propositional content is see: Récanati 2004, p. 8–16; Stanley, Szabó 2000/2007, p. 25.

All in all, minimalists can be characterised as those who think that there exists a level of propositional content which is immune to strong pragmatic effects and thereby exists something that is shared by all expressions of a sentence of a given syntactic type; furthermore, minimalists also believe that the number of context-sensitive expressions is remarkably limited.[15,16]

2. ALLEGED INCOMPATIBILITY OF THE THEORIES

2.1 THE INSTABILITY PROBLEMS

I would like to start this attempt of figuring out what relation actually holds between MH and Minimalism by taking a closer look at the possible reasons to think that they are not compatible. I think that the crucial one among them concerns the issue of so called *instability*.

MH has been classified as one of these useless relativistic theories that inevitably lead to the problem-causing *instability*. The phenomena of instability has a lot of faces that have analysed in various ways (see e.g. Fodor, Lepore 1992; Jackman 2017; Pagin 2006). To make a long story as short as possible: if each meaning in a system depends on every other meaning in the system (as the H-Principle says) and thereby a change of any meaning entails changes in the whole system, then such a system appears unstable. Instability *per se* should not be considered a failure (although it often is), however, when it affects language it seems to give rise to several detailed problems. I would like to focus on two of them.

The first one concerns the *impossibility of genuine disagreement*: if holism is true, then the meaning of each expression *in someone's idiolect*

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[15] It is worth emphasising here that the context-sensitivity that M2 is about concerns *any* sensitivity i.e. to both the strong and the weak pragmatic effects, and since in M1 the influence of the strong effects is ruled out, M2 effectively regards sensitivity of literal meanings to the weak pragmatic influences. Due to that, M2 allows us to differentiate minimalism from Stanley's (2007). Indexicalism, according to which most words have encoded in their semantics a requirement for some pragmatical adjustments (i.e. for some weak pragmatic influences).

[16] Within the types-tokens framework it may be said that minimalists believe that in most cases what is contributed to propositions by given tokens are the literal meanings of the relevant types (while contextualists think in many cases what a token contributes is something not identical to the literal meaning of a given type).

depends on all other meanings and in practice it makes it impossible for two people to mean the same by "p"; and thus when one expresses it with assertion, while the other one with negation (i.e. "$\neg p$"), there is no genuine disagreement between the speakers because they use "p" with different meanings.[17] The second problem is somehow wider as it involves the possibility of communication at all. Shortly speaking, if it appears impossible that two speakers ever mean *the same* by their utterances, then either we stay under the illusion that we communicate but in fact we do not (which is dispelled due to empirical observations that we *do* communicate), or our communication should be considered in terms of miracles.[18,19]

These problems, commonly taken to be the arguments against MH, are familiar to anyone who bothers with holism and defenders of MH have advanced several counterarguments to them (for some of them, direct or indirect, see Bilgrami 1998; Block 1986; 1994; Brandom 2000; 1994; Field 1977; Harman 1973; 1993; Jackman 1999; Lormand 1996; Rovane 2013, among others). I have presented these issues briefly not because I am going to offer further counterarguments, but because I want to cast some light on similarities between these particular problems and the arguments appearing in the discussion between supporters of Minimalism and Contextualism. Adherents

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[17] Another but closely related problem stems from treating the same person at different times as two theoretical speakers and it consists in the *impossibility of changing one's mind*. If at the moment t_0 I have a belief which I express by uttering "p" and at the moment t_1 I express "$\neg p$" standardly, we would describe such a situation as changing my mind about p. However, just as it is practically impossible that two speakers mean the same by "p", I cannot mean the same by "p" in t_0 in and t_1 (since if at least one meaning in my idiolect has been modified between those moments, the whole idiolect has changed). Hence, it appears as if I have not changed my attitude towards p, but rather have endorsed some *new* belief q in t_1 and decided that the best expression of that belief would be uttering "$\neg p$".

[18] For the discussion concerning disagreement and communication as troublesome to MH see e.g. Churchland 1993, p. 668–672; Fodor 1987, p. 55–60; Fodor, Lepore 1992, p. 17–22; Fodor, Lepore 2002, misc.

[19] For the sake of clarity my exposition of these issues is somehow simplified and focuses on the side of these problems directly associated with MH. The other side concerns the idea that meanings attached to words are determined by relevant beliefs of speakers. Roughly speaking, a change of a single belief causes the change of meaning of at least one word, and because of MH, it results in change of all the meanings, and thus the change of all the beliefs.

of the former view often accuse contextualists of capturing meaning
as something highly vulnerable to change and thus language as
something unstable. In particular, it is often pointed as one of the un-
fortunate consequences of Contextualism that it entails that successful
communication seems to be just a *miraculously* happy coincidence (see:
Cappelen, Lepore 2005, ch. 8; Récanati 2010, p. 6–10; Stanley 2000;
2002; 2005). Within Contextualism meanings are claimed to change
quite rapidly and freely across contexts which according to Minimalists
have the effect that for two speakers expressing *the same* meaning by the
same words[20] is highly unlikely. On the other hand, the problem con-
cerning the so called *faultless* disagreement,[21] which is taken to be one
of the main arguments against Contextualism, in principle boils down
to the same issues as those involved in the above-mentioned argument
from the impossibility of genuine disagreement.[22]

The resemblance of the problems that MH and Contextualism
have to face is probably responsible for why MH and Contextualism
are often tarred with the same brush; that, in turn, determines how
the relation between MH and Minimalism is seen: if MH has the in-
stability problems and so does Contextualism, then MH and Contex-
tualism are similar, and thereby MH cannot be compatible with Mini-
malism, because anything that is similar to Contextualism has to go
against Minimalism. However, we leave aside these family animosi-
ties between Minimalism and Contextualism, and we are going to in-
vestigate whether the instability is something that actually settles the
question concerning the compatibility of Minimalism and MH.

2.2 INSTABILITY OF MINIMALISM?

Minimalism appears to be the "conservative," noble view that
provides a solid ground for communication (and for the analysis of
communication as well) as it assumes that "there is a level of content
minimally influenced by context" (Cappelen, Lepore 2006, p. 425)

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[20] I mean here tokens of the same syntactical type.

[21] The discussion was apparently set up by the famous paper of Max Kölbel
(2004).

[22] The contextualist analogue of the *impossibility of changing one's mind* problem
would go as follows: if context heavily influences content of my utterances, it
appears very unlikely that I would be able to express "*p*" with *the same* meaning in
different contexts: in one context with assertion and in another one with negation.

and that content is "fully determined by its syntactic structure and lexical content: the meaning of a sentence is exhausted by the meaning of its parts and their mode of composition" (Borg 2012, p. 4). Shortly speaking, minimalists claim that there are so called *literal meanings* and that literal meanings as they are – without further adjustments – constitute intuitive propositional content.[23] Literal meaning is something that expression *has* i.e. it is its property, which does not change across contexts. Whatever way I may use the word "dog", all of my uses – according to minimalists – have something in common: namely, the literal meaning of the word. And whatever I wish to mean on different occasions by expressing the sentence "The dog is ready," all my uses express the same *minimal proposition*. The minimal proposition consists of the literal meanings of the single words appropriately composed and possibly complemented by the *weak* pragmatic effects (the same minimal proposition would be expressed by e.g. "Der Hund ist bereit" in German or "[Ten] Pies jest gotowy" in Polish etc.). As a result we obtain one pretty stable picture of language and communication. The picture includes the catalogue of stable literal meanings which constitute stable semantic content whereas everything that seems unstable is a matter of implicatures and other *strong* pragmatic phenomena. At this point it appears quite evident that it would be really difficult to reconcile such a stable view with the unstable MH.

Let us investigate, however, whether minimalism is genuinely immune to instability, or it is just *more stable* than its rivals, or maybe just makes the impression of being stable while in fact it is not that stable. Think of the above-mentioned argument concerning the possibility of communication.[24] If a word, say "dog", is supposed to possess a literal

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[23] Adherents of Moderate Contextualism or the Wrong Format View also accept literal meanings, however they do not endorse the thesis that literal meanings are essentially involved in the intuitive propositional content, instead they claim respectively that literal meanings sometimes do that or never do that.

[24] Minimalists believe that literal meanings are what lay the foundations of communication and what makes it possible to explain communication. Some of them are quite straightforward in saying that only Minimalism can deal with the issue in question: "Semantic Minimalism, and no other view, can account for how the same content can be expressed, claimed, asserted, questioned, investigated, etc. in radically different contexts. It is the semantic content that enables audiences who find themselves in radically different contexts to understand each other, to agree or disagree, to question and debate with each other. It can serve this function

meaning, then there has to be *the* literal meaning of the word. I believe that the nearest approximations of literal meanings we can arrive at are the appropriate dictionary entires. For instance, according to the "English Oxford Living Dictionaries" the primary meaning of "dog" is:

[**dog¹**] a domesticated carnivorous mammal that typically has a long snout, an acute sense of smell, non-retractable claws, and a barking, howling, or whining voice[25]

For the sake of argument let's assume that this is *the* literal meaning of "dog" – that it was somehow extracted from all uses of "dog" – and agree with minimalists that this meaning is stable and all uses of the word express this particular literal meaning (although due to the strong pragmatic effects they can additionally convey some *more* content than the literal meaning). Regardless of how defining such meaning would be even possible without a dose of divine help, it seems really unlikely that accepting such an account would make communication more comprehensible and less miraculous (than in case of Contextualism, for instance). Notice that [dog¹] involves a dozen or so meanings of other terms: "domesticated," "carnivorous," "mammal," and so on. Now, if to regard communication as not-miraculous one requires speakers to share the same meaning,[26] then it is very unlikely that one will be satisfied with the account of literal meaning we are discussing at the moment. For it seems at least very uncommon that two speakers would share exactly the same literal meaning [dog¹] and other literal meanings, each of which supposedly involves numerous other meanings (and [dog¹] probably does not belong to the most complex cases).[27] To look at the

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simply because it is the sort of content that is largely immune to contextual variations" (Cappelen, Lepore 2005, p. 152).

[25] See https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dog. Access: September 2017.

[26] I do not think such an account of communication is right, however, this is the account that grants arguments against MH or Contextualism described above. For a critique of this account see e.g. Block 1986, Churchland 1993, Harman 1973, Rovane 2013.

[27] This may be replied to by saying that to take dictionary entries as literal meanings approximations is attacking a straw man and in fact literal meanings are not complexes of any kind but rather simple sense-entities that human mind has access to and no description is able to actually give an account of them (I guess Fregean senses are the closest to this picture). I agree that such a view is immune to my argument, however, if communication boils down to *grasping non-definable sense-entities* and *sharing* them, I believe that is what most people would call the unbelievably miraculous miracle.

case from a different angle: it appears to be quite a miracle when, without any help of context[28], two people are able to use "dog" with the same meaning. It seems miraculous, because accomplishing this requires that they also share meanings of "domesticated," "carnivorous," "mammal," etc. and apparently many many more.[29]

A minimalist may now reply that she obviously does not assume that *identity* of meanings associated by different people with the same words is necessary for the communication to be successful. Instead, what is enough to understand each other is to share a *sufficient part* of the literal meanings. Such a strategy, however, cannot succeed as it faces the notorious problem of defining what is the "sufficient part."[30] Without having that defined it is impossible to explain satisfactorily how we succeed in communicating, so it still does not allow to anything more enlightening than taking the successful communication to be a very lucky coincidence.

Another possible response of a minimalist is to claim that in their theory the possibility of successful communication stems from the fact that in cases of misunderstandings speakers can always refer to the literal meanings which play then the role of the "highest authority". However, it still looks like a miracle that we usually get along *without* referring to the literal meanings (neither verbally, nor *mentally*). Moreover, in principle, the remedy for a misunderstanding would be referring to *any* meaning that all speakers accept as the one expressed by the words used, and that meaning does not have to be the literal meaning (if Alice agreed with Humpty-Dumpty that "glory" means "there's a nice knock-down argument for you" they would understand each other without a problem whenever speaking of *glories*).[31]

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[28] Such a help for most expressions is banned by the minimalist credo.

[29] From this point of view it looks as if Contextualism provides a more efficient way of analysing communication – roughly speaking, if two people do not share (in the strict sense concerning identity) the meaning of "dog", context may help them to adjust their meanings in a way that would enable them to succeed in communication.

[30] *Nota bene*, context looks like a good candidate for the auxiliary in defining that, doesn't it?

[31] I am not going to present an analogous argumentation for the instability within Minimalism with regard to the *possibility of genuine disagreement*, since I find it follows directly on from what I have said about the *miracle of communication* issue – it is enough to imagine a case of two people arguing about the truth-value

So the upshot is that Minimalism – although for other reasons and in a slightly different way than e.g. Contextualism or MH – also confronts the problem of instability. Hence, it is incorrect to say that [in]stability is what proves Minimalism to be incompatible with MH.

3. MINIMALISM AND MEANING HOLISM RECONCILED

In this section I am going to answer separately the question whether Minimalism is compatible with Global Holism, on the one hand, and whether Minimalism is compatible with Local Holism, on the other.

3.1 MINIMALISM AND GLOBAL HOLISM

Let me start with the attempt to figure out where exactly the alleged incompatibility of Minimalism and Global Holism (hereafter: "GH") may be discovered. To be incompatible with Minimalism, GH would have to entail the rejection of either M1 or M2 (or both). First, think of M2 which boils down to the claim that there are *not-many* context-sensitive expressions. At first glance it seems that any significant substantial connection between GH and M2 cannot exist, as the H-principle neither includes nor entails any claim concerning the number of context-sensitive expressions. As far as I am concerned this observation suffices to settle that GH does not entail the rejection of M2, yet I can imagine someone saying that the fact that in the GH credo there is nothing about the number of context-sensitive expressions[32] justifies only the conclusion that within GH the quantity of context-sensitive expressions is not strictly specified (i.e. GH does not assume that there is many of them, not many, few etc.). Hence, one may say, GH still can be ascribed with the view that *all* expressions (to put it plainly: literal meanings of all expressions) are context-sensitive.[33] Let's make the

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of "This is a dog". As I tried to show, in the minimalist framework it is extremely difficult for them to use the word "dog" with the same meaning so – along the lines of the *disagreement argument* against Contextualism – they do not genuinely disagree.

[32] Although GH as such boils down to the *general* claim concerning *all* literal meanings (namely that all literal meanings are formatted in a holistic way), yet it does not say anything about these meanings as appearing in contexts.

[33] I ignore here the idea that GH entails that *no* expressions are context-sensitive, since I cannot think of any – even the most extravagant – reasons to believe

effort to take this at face value for a moment. A global holist believes that literal meanings are constituted with regard to how the system they belong to is set up – in other words: with regard to how all other meanings are organised. Thus, it may be said that at the level of constituting literal meanings every meaning is *vulnerable to change* and the change occurs accordingly to the behaviour of the rest of language: if the literal meaning of "animal" changes, this will cause a change in the meaning of e.g. "dog", as well as in every other literal meaning in the language. That is what GH is about – defining / constituting / formatting / etc. of literal meanings – and as such GH does not bother with what happens to literal meanings when they appear in particular contexts.

To endorse the anti-minimalistic view that all expressions are context-sensitive a global holist has to commit themselves to something I call "the principle of *essential changeability*". According to the principle if a meaning undergoes changes at one level it changes at every other level as well.[34] Applied to the case of GH the principle says that if a meaning changes at the level of defining/constituting/formatting, it changes also in contexts. Although there is nothing in the H-principle itself that bans a global holist from accepting the principle of essential changeability, there is also nothing that would force them to endorse it. Concisely speaking, it is not inconsistent for a global holist to accept the minimalist thesis that only some limited group of expressions is sensitive to changes (caused by the strong pragmatic effects) in contexts,[35] while the rest – after being beforehand holistically defined – behaves *stably* in contexts (e.g. the literal meaning of "dog" is holistically formatted as [dog^1] and may be said to be invulnerable to any further changes in contexts). In other words, a global holist can accept the claim that in most cases the meanings introduced by tokens to propositions are identical to literal meanings of the relevant types.

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that it could be the case. The only possible way I can imagine a global holist to commit themselves to the thesis that there is no context-sensitivity in language is some unjustified confession of faith that it is so.

[34] In Kawczyński (2018) I refer to this principle to argue against the view that GH entails or is entailed by Contextualism.

[35] Moreover what GH offers is the general line of explaining *why* these expressions are context-sensitive – namely, due to the fact that language as something that is used to refer to *occasions*, has to contain some occasional parts and these are those parts that we call context-sensitive.

To sum up, GH – when not combined with the principle of essential changeability – does not entail the rejection of M2. GH and Minimalism are compatible with respect to that point.

What about M1? As a matter of fact, what has already been said is enough to leave no doubts that GH does not entail the rejection of M1 either. According to M1 these are the literal meanings of words that enter intuitive propositional content of a sentence used in a context. To paraphrase succinctly what I have explained above: GH is concerned with how literal meanings are constituted, and not with how they function later in particular contexts. That enables global holists to choose between various views concerning the latter issue (i.e. the functioning), among which is the minimalist one, expressed in M1. To entirely eliminate the possibility of endorsing Minimalism, global holists would have to accept the principle of essential changeability – which as pointed out earlier may be an option for a holist, but does not have to be.

To complete the picture of the relations between Minimalism and GH it should be asked whether Minimalism entails the rejection of GH.[36] I think that the answer for this one is quite straightforward: minimalists are not committed to any particular account of the origin of literal meanings and at the same time it is hard to recognise any obstacle for them to endorse the holistic view. What a minimalist maintains is that for the majority of expressions their literal meanings are what constitute the intuitive propositional content – *where those meanings come from* is above their worries. To put it roughly, you can think that literal meanings are *invulnerable to changes* in contexts but before occurring in the particular contexts they are *vulnerable to changes* indeed – e.g. as during their constitution-processes they are holistically adjusted accordingly to the changes of other meanings in a given language.[37]

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[36] Actually, the claim that Minimalism does not exclude GH follows (by the rules of logic) from the already-proved conclusion that GH does not entail the rejection of either M1 nor M2. Nevertheless, I am going to offer also some additional independent reasons supporting that claim.

[37] For example, the literal meaning of "dog" may be shaped to be [dog[1]] as a result of some holistic processes taking place throughout the whole language, but when someone uses the word in a context, it always expresses that previously-holistically-formatted literal meaning [dog[1]].

Again, essentiality of the vulnerability to change is activated when it comes to hindering the reconciliation between Minimalism and GH. This time, however, we should speak of "the principle of *essential <u>unchangeability</u>*": if a meaning cannot undergo changes at one level it cannot undergo changes at any other level as well. Thereby, if a minimalist – i.e. someone, who states that meanings do not undergo changes in contexts – accepts this principle, she cannot accept the holistic view, according to which literal meanings can change at the level of language as a whole. Instead, in such a case she is obliged to accept that literal meanings are unchangeable atoms and each of them is independent of any other. Although this kind of Minimalism is imaginable, it is but one version of the theory, one which assumes much more than the conjunction of M1 and M2. As a matter of fact, such an account can be seen as Minimalism enriched by the explicit *declaration* of endorsing anti-holistic, atomistic semantics.

To conclude then, the arguments I have offered show that Minimalism and GH do not exclude each other, are possible to reconcile and what is more – the theoretical cost of doing so is low for both sides. In addition, the rejection of GH by a minimalist boils down to enriching their theory with rather controversial claims for which it is hard to find a justification that would be independent of the *decision* of avoiding the holistic framework. All in all, a minimalist can reject GH, but if they do it should be considered an extension of Minimalism and not the consequence of its credo.

3.1 MINIMALISM AND LOCAL HOLISM

To discuss the apparent [in]compatibility of Minimalism and Local Holism we must provide the interpretation of the latter theory which would make it possible that Local Holism and Minimalism were on a collision course. Namely, since the minimalist credo is formulated in terms of propositions which are expressed by single sentences, I am also going to consider LH as concerning single sentences, i.e. as the view according to which:

(LH) Meanings of all simple expressions appearing in a sentence, which is uttered in a context, are formatted in a holistic way.[38]

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[38] Or in other words: *for all meanings involved in a sentence uttered in a context: meaning of a simple expression depends on meanings of all other expressions.*

Minimalism and LH are thus captured as having the same interests – namely, how literal meanings change in contexts – so the conflict between the theories is genuinely possible.

The point that calls for some clarification is what the processes allowed by the theories in question to modify meanings in contexts are. It is perfectly clear within Minimalism: only the weak pragmatic effects are accepted to modify the literal meanings that eventually become components of propositions. Within LH, on the other hand, it is not precisely defined what the holistic processes determining meanings are. And since the answer to this question will be decisive in judging if LH and Minimalism are compatible, I am going to take a wider look at the issue.

The following nomenclature will be helpful: "STR," "WEAK," "SEM" stand for being respectively a *strong pragmatic / weak pragmatic / purely semantic*[39] process. The scope of variables in the following statements encompasses all [holistic] processes that take part in formatting literal meanings which eventually become elements of propositions.

(1) Homogenous interpretations. The first three accounts of the nature of the holistic processes are *homogenous* as they assume that all holistic processes are of the same given kind.

(1a) If $\forall x\ STR(x)$, then LH $\rightarrow \neg$M1.[40]

In this interpretation it is assumed that all holistic processes which affect the literal meanings (to eventually make them constitute a proposition) are the strong pragmatic effects. It is quite explicit that LH interpreted this way is fundamentally incompatible with Minimalism.[41]

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[39] I take purely semantic processes to be such that they take part in meaning formatting in contexts without any call to contextual factors. I analyse their nature more broadly at the end of this section.

[40] Whether LH in such a form entails also the rejection of M2 depends on how the difference between the strong and the weak pragmatics is defined. If being sensitive to the strong effects *includes* being sensitive to the weak ones, then LH indeed entails the rejection of M2. If, on the other hand, the strong pragmatics is defined as separate from the weak pragmatics, then LH in the version now discussed assumes that all (which can be assumed to be more than *many*) expressions are sensitive to the former, while not to the latter type of processes and this account does not stand in contradiction to M2.

[41] As a matter of fact such a holism becomes nothing more or less than the Wrong Format View which is the polar opposition of Minimalism (in the field of the theories that accept literal meanings at all).

If all expressions go through holistic processes and these processes are the strong pragmatics, then there is no place in a proposition for literal meanings in their original form – and that is obviously against Minimalism.

(1b) If $\forall x$WEAK(x), then LH $\rightarrow$ ¬M2.

When the holistic processes are said to be the weak pragmatic effects, LH does not entail the rejection of M1, however, it still entails the rejection of Minimalism since it is incompatible with M2. It is so, because LH so interpreted assumes that *all* expressions are affected by the weak pragmatics, while according to M2 there is *not-many* expressions vulnerable to the weak effects of that kind.

(1c) If $\forall x$SEM(x), then ¬(LH $\rightarrow$ ¬M1) & ¬(LH $\rightarrow$ ¬M2) & ¬((M1&M2) $\rightarrow$ ¬LH).

It is not a surprise that if the processes allowed by LH were the purely semantic processes exclusively, the theory would be perfectly reconcilable with Minimalism – as Minimalism does not imposes any restrictions upon processes of that kind. As a matter of fact, in such a case LH could be seen as the version of Minimalism which narrows down the general formulation of the theory to the effect that *every* meaning depends (purely semantically) on every other meaning (non-holistic minimalists could maintain that e.g. only a limited number of expressions enter such correlations). However, although the compatibility is beyond a doubt here, it seems more like a purely technical and artificial compatibility than the real substantial possibility of merging the theories in question. The reason why it is so is that the assumption "$\forall x$SEM(x)" is itself highly unpleasant – not only in the framework of LH but in general[42] – since as a result of banning even the weak pragmatic effects from having an impact on propositions, it excludes the possibility of using indexicals. Thus, I think it is sensible to ignore this option in further discussions.

(2) Heterogenous interpretations. Holistic formatting can of course include more than one type of process and what is more – each of these types can have a different share in the whole. Since M2

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[42] See footnote 33 above.

concerns "not-many" expressions, to speak of the shares I will also use this highly imprecise quantifier as well as its equally imprecise converse: "many." By combining these two quantifiers with the three possible types of processes we end up with as many as twenty possible interpretations of what LH could be with regard to what the holistic processes are like. However, to reduce the list to only four relevant options it is enough to notice that:

(2a) If $\exists x STR(x)$, then LH $\rightarrow$ ¬M1

This is actually the stronger variant of (1a). It is enough for LH to allow the strong pragmatic effects at all – no matter to what extent – to entail the rejection of M1 (which does not allow any strong pragmatics) and thereby to be incompatible with Minimalism. Thus, all the interpretations of LH involving the strong pragmatics can be judged as leading to its incompatibility with Minimalism.

The further reduction of the list is possible when we realise that it does not make any difference if we choose to take either MANY or NOT-MANY expressions to be sensitive to purely semantic processes, because exercising both options in the framework of LH keeps the theory compatible with Minimalism (since Minimalism is very friendly to the purely semantic effects – see 1c above). Thus, what we are actually left with are the two following options.

(2b) If MANYx WEAK(x), then LH $\rightarrow$ ¬M2.

According to this interpretation, regardless of what else is possibly involved in the holistic formatting of meaning, if MANY expressions are affected by the weak pragmatic effects, it entails the rejection of M2 and thus LH and Minimalism appear incompatible.

(2c) If NOT-MANYx WEAK(x), then ¬(LH $\rightarrow$ ¬M1) & ¬(LH $\rightarrow$ ¬M2) & ¬((M1&M2) $\rightarrow$ ¬LH).

If LH sees meaning formatting as a matter of not-many expressions being affected by the weak pragmatic effects, the theory seems perfectly compatible with Minimalism, since that is exactly what minimalists stand up for.

The upshot is that there are three[43] interpretations of LH on which it appears incompatible with Minimalism (1b, 2a, 2b), and 2c as the only one which makes the theories apparently compatible.

It has to be remembered though, that what these interpretations capture are just logical correlations and nothing has been said so far about the actual possibility of accepting by holists the premises that all those interpretations start from. Even though I think there are good reasons to argue that local holists are not obliged to accept assumptions made in the incompatibility scenarios, I will not discuss it in detail because that would show merely that LH is *not incompatible* with Minimalism, which obviously is not equal to justifying that the theories are indeed compatible. Instead, I will focus on arguing that the compatibility scenario (2c) can be actually endorsed within LH and thus I will give an argument for the claim that LH and Minimalism can be reconciled.

In 2c it is stipulated that not-many of the expressions potentially forming a sentence is sensitive to the weak pragmatic effects. Since LH assumes that all expressions are sensitive to changes governed by the holistic rules, the natural question to ask is what happens to the rest of expressions – i.e. to those that are not vulnerable to the weak pragmatics. The natural answer is that what fills up the domain of holistic processes are the purely semantic factors.[44] The resulting picture would be something along the lines (I use square brackets to speak about meanings):[45] consider a sentence-type of the form "$\alpha\ \beta\ \gamma$", built of three simple expressions, each of which has its literal meaning – respectively: [α], [β] and [γ]. The proposition expressed by this sentence-type may be approximately represented as $[[\alpha][\beta][\gamma]]$.[46] Now imagine that someone utters the sentence (S) "$\alpha\ \beta\ \gamma$" in a context C. In accordance with the principle of LH the literal meanings go through the holistic machinery before reaching their destination in a proposition.

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[43] I omit here 1a since it is encompassed by the wider case 2a.

[44] The strong pragmatics has already been eliminated in 2a.

[45] The picture I give should be treated only as an aid to understand the idea of LH under the given interpretation. It is a simplification though, as it draws on the assumption that propositions are structured, which is definitely not compulsory for holists.

[46] For the sake of simplicity I ignore here any cases of direct reference and objects rather than meanings being elements of propositions.

The actual proposition expressed by (S) in *C*, composed of meanings after their holistic *check-in,* may be symbolised as [[α*][β*][γ*]].[47] The interpretation of LH under investigation assumes that what is transforming the literal meanings of "α," "β," and "γ" into the meanings appearing in the actual proposition are the weak pragmatic effects [in not-many cases] and purely semantic effects [for what reminds]. So for example in the case discussed let us stipulate that what has turned [α] into [α*] was some weak pragmatic effect, while [β] and [γ] were affected in the purely semantic way.

As clear and straightforward as this account may appear, let us consider if there are any possible reasons that would make it unavailable for local holists and thus make LH incompatible with Minimalism. Apparent vagueness of what are the purely semantic processes may be considered as one such obstacle. I think this is a reasonable doubt because it seems at least somewhat obscure what are those mysterious processes affecting meanings in contexts which at the same time involve no contextual factor. It may seem a bit ridiculous at first but my proposal is to assume that these purely semantic processes do nothing particularly spectacular. To put it plainly, let's take these processes to be *blockers* of the pragmatic effects in the sense that they protect literal meanings from being affected by the (weak or strong) pragmatic effects in contexts. For instance, the purely semantic process which transforms [β] into [β*] boils down to preserving [β] from the pragmatic/contextual influences (analogously in the case of [γ]). The result is that these literal meanings keep their original form when entering propositions, i.e. [β] = [β*] and [γ] = [γ*]. Roughly speaking, in the case of (S) used in *C,* the holistic machinery has determined that the literal meaning of "α" in these circumstances has to be contextually adjusted (and became [α*] which is not identical to[α]), while literal meanings of "β" and "γ" do not require any pragmatic modifications (so that [β] and [γ] as such became components of the proposition expressed by (S) in *C*).[48]

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[47] "[*e**]" stands for the meaning expressed by the expression "*e*" as it appears in a given sentence *S* used in a given context *C.*

[48] In a sense it can be said that purely semantic processes are the bridge between types and tokens and are the deep constitutional properties of expressions that make them possible to be used in real communication.

Eventually it appears that LH interpreted as the theory according to which holistic processes formatting meanings consists of the weak pragmatic effects (in not-many cases) and purely semantic processes can be successfully reconciled with Minimalism.

4. CONCLUSION

The three main conclusions from the above investigations are as follows:

I. Contrary to common opinion, Minimalism also faces the problem of so called instability (although for different reasons and in a slightly different manner than e.g. Contextualism or Meaning Holism).

II. It is neither the case that Global Holism entails the rejection of any of the two main minimalist theses, nor that Minimalism leads to the rejection of GH. If such rejections were to actually occur, either global holists or minimalists would have to endorse the principle of essential changeability/unchangeability which are neither compulsory nor the first-choice options for both sides. Instead, the theories are relatively easy to reconcile.

III. Neither Local Holism leads to the rejection of Minimalism, nor the other way round. Furthermore, among numerous possibilities of interpreting what are the holistic processes formatting meaning there is the option that enables us to reconcile the theories in question. Even if some might say that this interpretation is not the most common or favourable variant of holism, it seems quite sensible and is a good way of getting holism closer to the accounts postulating less context-sensitivity than various forms of Contextualism.

All in all, it looks like Meaning Holism is not doomed to play the role of an older sibling to Contextualism as it is possible to reconcile it with its more steady and noble cousin that is Minimalism. I believe that such a position works *for* holism as it makes it a possibly attractive complement to currently fashionable theories.

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