CONSTRUCTIVE-ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE
THE METAPHYSICAL, THE SEMANTIC, THE LOGICAL (1)

AUTHOR MEETS CRITIC:

DON'T BE SO FAST WITH THE KNIFE:
A REPLY TO KAPSNER

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ABSTRACT: *The is a brief reply to the central objection against the construction of my* The Fifth Corner of Four *by Andi Kapsner in his "Cutting Corners: A Critical Note on Priest's Five-Valued* Catuṣkoṭi. *This concerns the desirability of adding a fifth corner (ineffability) to the four of the* catuṣkoṭi.

Keywords: catuṣkoṭi, Fifth Corner of Four, *First Degree Entailment, Andi Kapsner, plurivalent logic, states of affairs ineffability*

In "Cutting Corners",[1] Andi Kapsner takes issue with one of the important aspects of my *Fifth Corner of Four*.[2] He makes a number of interesting points, and it is not my intention here to take up all of them. In particular, I am going to leave matters of textual exegesis aside. I intend to discuss just Kapsner's central point.

To locate this, let me briefly describe the details of the formal construction in the part of the book that concerns him. This comes in three stages:

(1) First, I give an account of the *catuṣkoṭi* in terms of a four-valued logic, FDE. The Bearers of semantic values are sentences, and the values are t (true only), f (false only), b (both), and n (neither).

(2) The next step is to extend the logic by adding a fifth value, e, representing ineffability. In this structure, the bearers of values are thought of as states of affairs,

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[1] Kapsner 2020.

[2] Priest 2018. I will refer to this as *5of4*. Page and section references in what follows are to this.

and the original values have to be reinterpreted as the kinds of things that can be properties of such states. Thus, for example, if *A* is state of affairs which has thevalue *b* then both *A* and ¬*A* obtain. I note that, with just as much coherence, one could take the semantic bearers to be propositions rather than state of affairs, as §5.4 points out. The first four values may then retain much their usual meaning. However, the official story in *5of4* is about states of affairs.

(3) In the third stage we move from the five-valued logic to a plurivalent logic, in which states of affairs may have more than one of the five values, thus accommodating the contradictory possibility that something may be both effable and ineffable.

Now, Kapsner's concern is with the value *e*—and so the second and third stages of the construction. He thinks that one should simply cut it. This does not mean that he is unhappy with the possibility of something's being ineffable, or even being ineffable and effable. In the final section of his paper, he suggests how one can simply take effability to be a monadic predicate of states of affairs, structured as in phase two of my procedure, minus the value *e*—and so remaining four-valued. In fact, I have some sympathy with this view, as will become clear in due course. What concerns me here are the arguments he gives against the five-valued approach. As I'll explain, I'm not persuaded.

Kapsner has four related arguments for cutting *e* out of the space of values— though I think it fair to say that the force of each of the first three is supposed to come out more clearly in the next. At any rate, I take the last objection to be the most interesting. I shall take the objections in the order he gives them. I take the slogan for each point from just before the beginning of his §3.1. The numbers below correspond to his subsections.

3.1 Semantic values should form a cohesive set. e does not cohere with the others.
The first four values are (let us assume) exclusive. However, ineffability seems to be, not a fifth possibility, but to be orthogonal to the these, since it is independent of whether a state of affairs or its negation obtains.

Now it is certainly true that being ineffable is orthogonal to obtaining. But this does not get the picture quite right, as Kapsner notes. In the second phase of the construction, the precise understanding of the values is as follows. If *A* is a state of affairs:

• *A* has the value *t* iff *A* is effable, *A* obtains, and ¬*A* does not obtain.

• *A* has the value *f* iff *A* is effable, *A* does not obtain, and ¬*A* does.

• *A* has the value *b* iff *A* is effable, and both *A* and ¬*A* obtain.

• *A* has the value *n* iff *A* is effable, and neither *A* nor ¬*A* obtains.

• *A* has the value *e* if *A* is ineffable.

Clearly, this partition of the space of affairs is exclusive and exhaustive. There is, then, no orthogonality.

Kapsner says that *e* is still incongruous, since obtaining is ontological, whilst ineffability is semantic. Now, the boundary between ontology and semantics is somewhat fraught. That Andi is either mortal or not mortal is a state of affairs that obtains. Is this a semantic fact? (It holds in virtue of the meanings of 'or' and 'not'.) Or is it an ontological fact? (It holds in virtue of the fact that Andi is mortal.) But in any case, it is not clear   that a state of affair's being ineffable is semantic. This tells you that there is something about the state of affairs in question which transcends all linguistic/conceptual categories. As such, it is certainly telling you something about the *nature* of the state in question. If so, this appears to be ontological.

3.2 Semantic values should "look like" a topic apt for logical study. e does not look like that.

Kapsner compares the notion of ineffability with that of being clumsily phrased, which is orthogonal to the four standard semantic values, but clearly of little logical relevance. He is aware that this is only a loose analogy, but asks what the difference is between this and ineffability.

The answer is as follows. Two sentences can express the same proposition or refer to the same state of affairs, and yet one can be clumsily phrased and the other not. Logic is about what sentences express or refer to, not about the syntax of the expressions involved. (Clearly, one and the same proposition or state of affairs might be expressed/referred to by sentences of completely different languages.)

Now, whether or not a proposition or state of affairs is ineffable is intrinsic to that proposition or state of affairs. If a proposition or state of affairs is ineffable, it cannot be expressed in different ways, since it cannot be expressed at all. In other words, being clumsily phrased is not a property of propositions or states of affairs; being ineffable is. Logic is about inferences which preserve properties of propositions or states of affairs. So ineffability, unlike being clumsily phrased, is indeed something that logic may concern itself with.

3.3 Extra semantic values should make a difference to logical consequence. e is otiose in this regard.

Now, moving from the first phase of the construction to the second by adding *e* certainly makes a difference. The inference $A \vdash A \lor B$ becomes invalid. However, moving to the third phase of the construction does not change the notion of logical consequence. In general, moving from a many-valued logic to its plurivalent version may or may not do this.[3] This is an interesting fact about such logics.

That is not the issue that really concerns Kapsner though. What concerns him is that if at the third phase of the construction nothing can take just the value *e*, the logical consequence relation is that of FDE, and so of the first phase. So we might just as well have stuck with phase one—though we may give the semantic bearers

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[3] See Priest 2014.

an ontological reading, as Kapsner does in his own construction.

There are a couple of issues here. Kapsner sees no reason to suppose that there are things that have just the value *e*, that is, which are simply ineffable (and not effable as well), though he has no arguments for the claim. Given the present context, one might well take the onus of proof to be on him to establish the point. However, questions of onus of proof are tricky, and he might well insist that the onus of proof is on me to show that there are.

Now, it is true that it seems impossible to give any examples of things that are simply ineffable in this way, since to give an explicit example one would have to use words, and so make the state of affairs effable. Neither am I aware of any specifically Buddhist reasons for supposing there to be such things (and I know of no Buddhist thinkers who addressed this issue explicitly). However, it is not difficult to give an argument for the existence of simply ineffable things by deploying some more contemporary machinery. Just consider modern set theory with its absolute infinity of ordinals. There are so many of these that most cannot be referred to, or, indeed, picked out by a specification of any kind. Any such ordinal is either a successor ordinal or it is not. However, whichever of these is the case, the state of affairs is ineffable, simply because we cannot pick out the ordinal to predicate anything of it. Possibly there are some paradoxical cases where an ineffable ordinal is effable as well, such as that of the least indefinable ordinal;[4] but these are obviously special cases.

Secondly, and in any case, the claim that extra semantic values are of use only if they change the consequence relation is just not true, as the plurivalence construction itself reminds us. For a more familiar example, simply consider the standard semantics for classical propositional logic. This deploys just the two-valued Boolean algebra. However, we can equally give a semantics for the same consequence relation with an arbitrary Boolean algebra, and so with as many more values as one wishes. And there may well be a point to doing so, since one may then take the semantics to concern, not truth values, but propositions. The point is that a consequence relation tells you about arguments as interpreted some way or another; and it may well be the case that different interpretations support the same consequence relation. The different semantics are important not (just) because they tell you something about the consequence relation, but because they tell you something important about how arguments are to be interpreted.

3.4 It should be clear why a value is designated. This is not the case with e. Concerning this point: first of all, designated values are a matter of importance only if we are defining a notion of logical validity, and this is not the main point of the exercise in *5of4*. As I say (Priest 2018, 25):

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[4] This is König's paradox. See, e.g., Priest 2019, §4.4.

> Just to make matters clear: I am not suggesting the theory of validity delivered by FDE was endorsed by our Buddhist philosophers. Accounts of validity of this kind were just not on their agenda. The point is to show how the metaphysics of the *catuṣkoṭi* makes perfectly good and precise sense from the perspective of contemporary logic.

This is said about phase one of the construction, but it applies equally to phases two and three. In other words, I am interested in the semantics as a way of explicating the appropriate metaphysical structure. That is, as I put it concerning the last point, how matters are to be interpreted.

However, it is true that I do use the semantics to define a notion of logical consequence, and I take e not to be designated. In that context, it is a fair question as to why e is not designated. In the book, I say that e should not be designated since it is not a species of truth (or obtaining, if one puts matters in an ontological register). Kapsner takes me to task over this, and I think quite correctly. Some things that obtain are ineffable; some are not.

In phase two of the construction, the only designated values are t and b (a feature inherited by phase three). Now why should we be interested in inferences which preserve these values? Recall from the discussion of 3.1 what these values mean. An inference that preserves these things is such that if the states of affairs which are premises obtain and are effable, so is the conclusion. It is clear why one might be interested in inferences that preserve the property of obtaining. Given that we know that the premises of our argument obtain, it informs us that the conclusion does. But why should effability be relevant? Simply because a valid inference is then such that if we know that we can express the premises, we are guaranteed that we can express the conclusion. Obviously, that's a useful fact. Using this notion of validity, we can be sure that our conclusion can be articulated, and so grasped. In other words, we are guaranteed that our conclusion will never leave us speechless!

There might, though, be a role for a notion of validity that preserves simply obtaining—though there be no guarantee that the conclusion of the argument is expressable. The machinery of phase two or phase three will not allow for such a notion to be defined. One way to express such a notion is to use the apparatus of phase one, except that t and b represent a state of affairs as obtaining, whether or not it is ineffable. This is essentially the machinery that Kapsner sketches in his §4. Hence, I do not see this as a rival account of validity. It is just inferential machinery which preserves different things. Take your pick for your purpose.

At any rate, as I hope is now clear, the fifth corner is not otiose, either metaphysically or in terms of a sensible notion of logical consequence. Kapsner's surgery is, then, over-zealous.

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