Some impressions of Frank Veltman

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Frank Veltman was my promotor when I defended my PhD thesis *Belief Dynamics* at the ILLC on 13 November 2001. Although Frank had done a lot of supervision work before, I was his second official PhD student (Gwen Kerdiles, who defended his thesis the day before, was Frank's first). As a supervisor, Frank gave me complete liberty, and so taught me to trust my own philosophical and stylistic intuitions. Not only did we have a common philosophical outlook (we discovered that we both thought that qualia were nonsense, for instance), he also shared his taste for elegance and perfection with me (unfamiliar as I then was with the work of David Lewis, I only later appreciated Frank's praise of him).

If I were to characterize Frank as a supervisor, I certainly would have to mention his reserve in praising the work of others and his complete lack of vanity (the fact that Frank all of a sudden wore a suit on the first day he was listed on the university's pay-roll as a full professor turned out to be purely coincidental). Let me give two examples. My PhD thesis was on the logic and epistemology of belief revision. In its logical chapters, I devised a four-valued system of information revision, where possibly inconsistent information states nonetheless always gave rise to consistent sets of beliefs. After Frank took over the role of supervisor from Hans Rott, who had left the ILLC for a professorship in Regensburg, for months I was not so sure about Frank's judgment of my work, although we had discussed it extensively a couple of times. Then, in a manuscript discussion session, I finally was relieved (and proud) to see that Frank had written spontaneously "Mooi!" ("Nice!") in the margins of my proof that my five postulates for information contraction characterized a unique contraction operator. I still have this manuscript with Frank's annotations.

In another manuscript discussion session, Frank commented upon a paper in which I presented a four-valued expansion operator with which a new piece of information could be incorporated in an information state. In a special section of the paper, I showed that as long as the information state and the new information were consistent, my expansion operator could be used to simulate Frank's update semantics. Frank firmly insisted that this section on update semantics was to be left out of my thesis, because he did not want to be one of those supervisors who are so vain that they have their PhD students discuss their own work.

In a similar vein, I once asked Frank why he did not include his own work into the reading material of one the courses he lectured. Frank answered that there was a large body of philosophical literature that simply was more important than the things he himself had done and that the students needed to read the important stuff first. Importance, of course, is subject to change. Some papers tend to be forgotten, some are superseded by others. Some of Frank's papers have by now become philosophical classics.

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