

Truth and Agreement

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Abstract

This paper discusses non-indicative uses of indicative sentences. So-called declarative uses are argued to resist an analysis that is based on the idea of there being an underlying proposition, a traditional assumption in linguistics and philosophy. It is argued that certain types of evaluative or coordinative discourse are also of such a non-propositional kind. The mere acknowledgment of this fact helps clarifying the kind of faultless disagreements that philosophers and linguists have been struggling with. The kind of constitutive use, so-called, is a precondition for the statement of propositions.

Keywords: Truth, Relativism, Propositions, Evaluative Discourse, Faultless Disagreement, Negotiation of Meaning.

1 Introduction

Declarative sentences can be used to provide factual information and to present the world as being a certain way. They then engage, as it is called in (Searle 1975), in a word-to-world direction of fit. The words are assumed to picture the way things are, so that if you happen to not know how things are, the words may tell you, and they thus may guide you into the world by describing it. Declarative sentences are also used to inform practically, and tell you what you should do, or what the world

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should be like. They can be taken to invoke, in the words of (Searle 1975) again, a world-to-word direction of fit. Upon this use these sentences are supposed to guide you to make you and the world comply with what is said. The two types of usage, upon this characterization, appear to be closely related. Both are concerned with a fit between words and world, in whatever direction.

The first type of use has often been taken as paradigmatic in the philosophy of language and also in linguistics, and it has been taken as a starting point for the understanding of the second type. Sentences, upon this view, are taken to express propositions, which make out the contents of our beliefs and assertions in the first place, and the very same propositions are subsequently seen to provide for the contents of other speech acts such as questions, commands and requests.¹ Thus, quite generally, a declarative sentence *S* can be taken to picture the world to be a certain way, and on one type of its uses (in assertive mode) a speaker may invite the hearer to consider the world to be that way, and take it to be the way *S* describes it to be; on the other type of use (in directive mode) it may serve to invite the hearer to change the world that way, and make it the way *S* describes it to be.

The various uses can be, and often are, of course, indicated by explicit markers of mood, but it appears to be an established fact that sentence which are grammatically indicative in their surface form may serve both types of purpose. (Searle 1975 and, more recently, Recanati 2013) Thus, each of the following sentences can be used to either describe a state of affairs, or to direct or issue one:

- (A) “This is your desk.”
- “You do not do that.”
- “All rise.”
- “We attack tomorrow at noon.”
- “A candidate answers every question.”

It is not at all difficult to understand these sentences as yielding an idea of the world, a proposition, and as either informing us that the real world is being that way, or as directing us so as to make the real world be that way. Recanati observes that “it is a striking fact that, quite systematically, declarative sentences —

¹The roots of this type of view are often traced back to Frege 1879 and the view itself seems to have been properly developed and articulated in Searle 1969 and much subsequent work.

which undoubtedly express propositions – have *both* constative and performative readings.” (Recanati 2013, p. 629)

The sketched, classical, view is not unproblematic, though. There is of course great theoretical elegance in a theory of meaning that could do with a variety of uses of only one type of abstract semantic, propositional, content. However, it appears that not all uses of (indicative) sentences can be properly understood by employing the idea of an underlying propositional core. Regarding other sentence types, or sentences in other than declarative moods, serious doubts have already been raised about the presence of such a propositional core. I do not want to go, here, into the (in-)appropriateness of such a classical analysis of, e.g., the directive and imperative uses of sentences, some quite critical discussion of which the reader may find in, e.g., (Mastop 2011; Recanati 2013; Portner 2016). Instead, I will first, in the second section of this paper, briefly discuss one particular type of usage of declarative sentences for which a classical, propositional-core type of analysis seems to be quite inappropriate.

In the third, main, section of this paper I will next argue that it is precisely the idea of a propositional core that also hampers our understanding of a type of evaluative discourse that has troubled philosophers and linguists for some decades now. A phenomenon that has become known as one of *faultless disagreement* is not, as seems to have been quite widely assumed, a disagreement about the *relative truth*, so-called, of propositional contents. In such disagreements, I argue, there is no such content. If truth is relative, it is not the truth of propositions that is relative to certain standards, judges or other kinds of parameters of assessment, but it is the conception of a proposition itself that can only be agreed upon relative to such standards. Needless to say that the picture that we sketch does not by itself answer the question how the actual relativization of propositions can be accommodated in semantic theory. The fourth and final section of this paper is therefore devoted to a tentative –critical and inconclusive–, investigation of how semantic theory might or might not respond to the findings of this paper.

2 Propositions and Declarations

Declarative sentences can be used to provide factual information, a usage upon which they are taken to, as it is said, *express propositions*. The term ‘proposition’ is

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normally used as a term of (logico-philosophical) art, and there is hardly anything that one can say about the nature of propositions that is not controversial. However, it is possible, and useful, to state some very plausible assumptions that most generally accompany the accepted usage of the term. First, a proposition is the kind of thing that is assumed to be objectively true or false. Second, what it is that is true or false is something that is assumed to be intersubjectively grasped or understood. Third, in the case of elementary propositions, designated individuals are understood to have designated properties, or to stand in designated relations, and in those cases the truth (falsity) of a proposition resides in it (not) being the case what is understood to be the case, that is to say, it resides in the individuals' (not) having the designated properties, or (not) standing in the designated relations.

In the above characterizations of a proposition I have deliberately employed the locution “assumed to be”, and “designated”, several times. If one generically shares or agrees with the assumptions (and designations) then one can safely drop the locutions from the characterizations, and endorse one’s own conception of a proposition instead.² One does not, however, need to commit to any such conception of a proposition, and also then, I believe, my characterizations, with the qualifications mentioned, are still viable. For the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to conceive of a proposition as whatever it is that is assumed to be objectively true or false, relative to an assumed agreement about the meanings of the terms employed in stating the proposition.

Perhaps it helps to informally identify a proposition with what *we understand* a certain utterance to say, which is what *we assume* the interlocutors (perhaps including us) understand the utterance to say, and what they collectively assume to be said to be objectively true, or false. If such an utterance is of the form “Trump tweets.” we understand, most probably, that the person that we, interlocutors and us, understand to be Trump is engaged in the activity of what we, interlocutors and us, understand to be tweeting, and this proposition (in a non-technical sense) is true if and only if that Trump is actually engaged in that kind of tweeting. In such a

²Thus, a proposition is the assumed kind of thing that is objectively true or false, it is the kind of thing that can be grasped, and in an elementary proposition individuals are understood to have certain properties and stand in certain relation. Notable, elaborate, conceptions of a proposition, for instance those that can be traced back to those we find in (Frege 1918; Russell 1912; Wittgenstein 1922), are quite generally taken to satisfy the mentioned characterizations. Also sets of worlds, or truth-makers, can be taken to satisfy the picture.

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case, we assume we agree not only on the syntactic structure of the utterance (e.g., that it is of the form $[[\text{Trump}]_{NP} [\text{tweets}]_{VP}]_S$), but we more in particular assume we agree on what the use of “Trump” stands for and we assume we agree on what the use of “tweets” means. If we do so, we can assume we agree on a proposition that is expressed, and that we can assume to be either true, if the designated Trump does the designated tweeting, or false otherwise.³

Notice that if there can be assumed to be wide, universal, agreement about the use of the constituent terms, then we can simply speak of the meaning of the utterance, or the proposition that it expresses, without any qualifications of the kind “assumed to be agreed upon”. Then our characterization could very well align with any classical conception of a proposition. Notice, furthermore, that if we cannot assume there to be universal agreement about the meaning and proper use of the constituent expressions, an assumption that, besides being a viable methodological idealization in semantic theory, appears to be rather unrealistic, empirically speaking, the remaining assumptions, stated above, seems to be rather pertinent on each and every occasion. If we would not make any of the above assumptions, it seems there would not be any ground for saying that we grasped a proposition that is being expressed. Even if one of the interlocutors, or some interpreter, might think she did understand the locution to express a proposition, it appears hard in that case, if not impossible, to maintain that we have identified one. It would require other locutions to say or explain what that proposition would be, and our grasp of it would, I believe, be conditional again upon an assumed agreement about the terms used in the subsidiary locutions.

Notice finally, that, if we do, on the relevant occasions, endorse the said assumptions, our characterization of a proposition is still consistent, not only with a classical conception of it, but also with fairly radical relativist or contextualist conceptions as emerge from, e.g., Peter Ludlow’s dynamic lexicon program. (Ludlow 2014) After he has argued that word meanings are underdetermined and subject to modulation and “that this kind of undetermination holds for possibly every predicate that we use” (p. 101), he furthermore states, as a principle, that:

³The assumed agreement on the denotation of a term may take various forms. It can consist in the actual demonstrative identification of a referent, which is commonly acknowledged, or in the agreement on a common denominator or description, or in a shared reliance on a linguistic community in which the denotation is established. All we need, here, is the assumption that there is some such common agreement.

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No utterance u of a sentence S is admissible (...) unless discourse participants (tacitly) agree that the terms of S are modulated so that an utterance of the sentence will be determinably either true or false. (p. 112)
When we are saying the truth value is indeterminate, we are saying that it is not admissible—it cannot be deployed to make an assertion. (p. 113)

Elsewhere I have argued that views like this do not undermine the enterprise of formal semantics, neither do they threaten the methodological principle of compositionality, so-called. (Dekker 2014; Dekker 2017a)

Whatever is one's favorite conception of a proposition, or by whatever means one would like to understand the concept, if it complies with the above characterization it seems it can be seen to provide for a propositional core or content of sentences in general, and so that the various uses of sentences come with various uses of employing that content. If a sentence figures in an assertion it can be taken to assert the actual truth of the expressed proposition, and in a directive or imperative mode the sentence can so to speak be taken to order its truth. This idea of a propositional core is indeed appealing, however, it is not generically satisfying. As said, I will not here discuss the (in-)appropriateness of this idea regarding indicatives used in a directive mood, or regarding imperatives. I only want to point out in what follows that the idea appears to be quite inappropriate to explain our understanding of certain declarative uses of indicative sentences.⁴

I will say that a use of a sentence is declarative if it is taken to declare itself true. They are "cases where, so to speak, 'saying makes it so'." (Searle 1975, p. 358) François Recanati gives the following examples, among a few others:

'The session is open' is a standard example of a performative utterance, whose role is to make it true that the session is open (...). A similar case is that of 'it's yours': an utterance of that sentence can be understood (...) as a declaration, making it the case that it's yours (Recanati 2013, p. 629)

⁴Even though, as said, my aim here is not to discuss directive uses of indicatives, I do like to add the following observation. If a general uses the sentence "We attack tomorrow." with directive intentions, and if one conceives of what is expressed by that locution as something that is true or false, one is really understanding it the wrong way. This seems to imply that what is taken to be expressed, intuitively, is not a proposition, as just characterized.

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Another typical example is that of the chair of a meeting who declares the meeting closed by saying “The meeting is closed.” Baptisms are also declarative. One can name a child, and declare it to be called, e.g., Kees, by saying “This child is called Kees.” Myth has it the meter has been defined by the declaration “This is one meter,” in the presence of a by now famous platinum bar in Paris, more than two centuries ago. We can include as examples more stipulative definitions, like the definition, in some legal agreement, of the contractors, or of the goods dealt with; or the definition of a cube in a textbook on geometry; or the definition of a sentence of dynamic modal predicate logic in, e.g., a Handbook of Semantics; etc.

I will employ the definition of a meter as a typical example, but whatever I say should apply to all other properly declarative uses. Let us consider the utterance of the following sentence, in the presence of a particular bar:

(M) “The length of this bar is one meter.”

If the utterance has taken place in an appropriate context, and under appropriate circumstance, the length of one meter can thereby be taken to be defined to be the length of the demonstrated bar. Henceforth, whatever has the length of that bar has a length of one meter.⁵

The original idea, the idea that we aim to challenge, is that the above sentence expresses a proposition, and that it is not asserted or required to be true, but, e.g., that it is declared to be true. So let us, for the sake of the argument, try and see what this proposition could be that is thereby declared true. We have assumed that we agree on there being this bar, and we may assume, for the time being, that we accept, and agree with, the definition, given with (M), of the property of being one meter long as being extensionally equivalent with having the length of this bar. Obviously, the bar, thus determined, has a length of one meter, thus defined, so the proposition that appears to be expressed by “The length of this bar is one meter.” is true, analytically, by definition, or ‘*a priorily*’ as (Kripke 1972, p. 54–7) would say. It must however be obvious that *that*, an analytically true proposition, cannot be the proposition that is declared true by the above use of (M). What sense could there be in declaring something true that is analytically true?

⁵There is nothing exceptional about this. Children, every now and then, and for the time being, practically redefine the meter as the width of one major step, thereby produced, to determine the contours of the current playing field in terms of the meter thereby defined.

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It should be kept in mind that we are here not talking about the assertive use of the verb “declare.” “‘Declare’ in English also functions as an assertive prefix, as in ‘I declare that the contents of this document are true and complete.’” (Searle 1989, fn. 6) The assertive use, of course, does permit, even requires, some kind of propositional content. This use is however surely distinct from the performative use that is under discussion here. At several places Searle emphasizes that a declarative use “brings about a state of affairs.” (Searle 1975, p. 367)

It is the defining characteristic of this class [of declarations, PD] that the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality; successful performance guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the world (...). (Searle 1975, p. 358) The performance of a declaration brings about a fit [between propositional content and reality] by its very successful performance. (Searle 1975, p. 359)

Now if there is this proposition that is analytically true, it seems no change can be brought about by declaring it true. The proposition is and was (analytically) true in some kind of timeless sense. The declaration of that fact would be an entirely idle move, so no declaration at all.⁶

The question what proposition it could be that is declared to be true should also not be answered by drawing from, so to speak, the *old* meaning of “one meter”. Agreeing on there being this bar, we could of course also assume we agree on the proposition that it has the length of one meter in the way we understood the property of having that length before this definition was given. It should however be obvious that this kind of proposition is immaterial to the intended meaning of the definition we seek to clarify. For one thing, the term “one meter” could have been defined, in the above way, for the very first time, so that there would not even be any ‘old meaning.’ Such would by no means hamper the use of a (M) as a definition. More importantly, whatever it is that one may have been used to call “one meter” before, is completely irrelevant to what the declarative use of (M) seeks to accomplish now: it overrules whatever previous rules of interpretation.

⁶Notice that we do not at all deny Kripke’s point here that this *a priori* proposition is metaphysically contingent. It surely is, because the very bar could have been longer or shorter than it actually is. However, the fact (truth of the *diagonal proposition* perhaps) that this bar has the length that it actually has is true, no matter whether someone declares it to be so or not.

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Persisting in the attempt to find a proper propositional analysis, one may be tempted to resort to some metasemantic explanation. The idea would be that when people are engaged in a baptism and say “This is Kees.” this should be taken to mean: “This individual is going by the name of ‘Kees’ from now on”. Or likewise, when we picture the definition of a meter in the presence of the bar, what one is really taken to say is “The denotation of the term ‘one-meter’ from now on equals the length of this bar.” These alternative reformulations may indeed serve to express a certain metasemantic content that can be supposed to be declared true in the indicated baptisms and definitions under consideration.

Although a metasemantic account appears to be promising at very first sight, it cannot however be seen to provide for a satisfactory answer to our original question. If we employ a metalinguistic reformulation in place of the original, it must obviously be taken to be used declaratively, not descriptively, so which proposition is it that would have been declared true then? It appears then that there is no substantial difference between defining *a meter* from now on to equal the length of this bar, or defining *the denotation of ‘one-meter’* from now on to equal the length of this bar. If we define the denotation of ‘one-meter’ from now on to equal the length of this bar, then, obviously, the phrase “The denotation of ‘one-meter’ from now on equals the length of this bar” is true, analytically, by just this definition. However, this cannot be the proposition that is declared true, because, again, there appears to be no sense in declaring an analytic proposition true, as I hope to have explained above.⁷

So far we have been trying to determine the kind of propositional content that can be considered to be declared true in declarations. This attempt has remained unsuccessful, and this may come as no surprise. Already earlier in this paper we have observed that a proposition, whatever it is, is something that, typically, is true, or false. Obviously there is no real sense in declaring true something that is true, or declaring true something that is false. Such would be pointless, for reasons analogous to those stated above. If something gets declared true, it is not

⁷It can be proposed that the proposed change in the denotation of ‘one-meter’ should be attributed to its very declaration. (C.f., e.g., Eckardt 2012.) The use of (M) can be taken to express the self-referential proposition that the denotation of ‘one-meter’ changes in the way indicated through this very use of (M). This yields something that, if true, is true by its very declaration. Obviously, this is not that kind of proposition that by itself is objectively true, or false. It is true, if it is intersubjectively accepted. This is an issue we will come back to in due course.

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something that in or of itself is already true, or not true, so, in other words, it is not a proposition.

When Searle discusses the propositional contents of declaratives (“declarations”) he specifies them further as “states of affairs”, which by the very declarations are “brought about,” or “realized,” or “brought into existence.” (Searle 1975, p. 367) Surely, states of affairs are not the kind of propositions that we have been reflecting upon here, so they might therefore be taken to solve the observed problems. However, upon further reflection, it is hard to really see how states of affairs improve over propositions in providing for the propositional contents of definitions.

According to our ordinary usage in natural language a state of affairs is factual, it is something that is the case. Now obviously it does not make much sense to point out something that is the case and then declare it. (This would be like envisaging to build the bridge that has already been built.) Therefore, and more in accordance with philosophical parlance, it seems we should be thinking of states of affairs that can be taken to possibly exist or obtain, and that are declared to exist or obtain. However, now our previous question (“What are these propositions declared true?”) shows up again, but only in a new guise: “What are these states of affairs that are declared existent?”

These possible states of affairs must, one way or the other, be understood to be defined, themselves, by their constituent terms, and this confronts us with the very same problems that we faced above. What could be the constituents of the possible states of affairs that this bar has the length of one meter? We have, again, this very bar that we have agreed upon. The other constituent must be something like the property of having the length of one meter. Which property can that be supposed to be? If it is the property currently being defined to be the property of having the length of this very bar, we are constructing a state of affairs in which the bar has a property that it cannot fail to have. Again, it does not seem to make any sense to declare existent a state of affairs in which this bar has the length it has. However, any alternative conception of having the length of one meter will not do either. What point is there in declaring this bar to have a length that it doesn’t have? If one were to think, “well isn’t it, obviously, a state of affairs, roughly, of the form: $\langle d, \textit{One_Meter_Long} \rangle$?”, then one overlooks the fact that that very state of affairs must be supposed to define its own constituent *One_Meter_Long*. There simply is no suitable state of affairs that we can nail down this way.

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The main problem in our queries is that we are looking for some proposition or propositional content that gets declared true, while that proposition or content at the same time is supposed to be defined itself by the very declaration. A simple way to avoid the problem is, of course, to simply forget about there being such a content to begin with, and there may be good reason for doing this. Like I indicated earlier, in order to settle or agree on a proposition it is generally presupposed that we agree on the terms employed in stating it. Declarations, and definitions, really are one of those means we employ to settle such agreements, agreements on the meaning and use of certain terms. Any proposal to settle such an agreement cannot of course presuppose precisely the agreement that it seeks to establish. It must therefore be essentially wrong to think of the act of defining a constituent term as an act of declaring true a proposition that is defined in terms of that very constituent term. In order to ever get at any proposition, its terms will have to be defined and agreed upon in the first place. Such can actually be read from the quote by Peter Ludlow above.

Once we feel no longer committed, theoretically, to finding or defining a kind of proposition that is something that can be declared true, or a state of affairs that is something that can be declared existent, there is no longer any obstacle in giving suitable characterizations of what the above definition of a meter does, or of what happens in the pronouncement of a couple as man and wife, or in the baptism of a child, or in the declaration of a variable in a programming language. Following David Lewis' adagium, "In order to say what a meaning *is*, we may first ask what a meaning *does*, and then find something that does that" (Lewis 1970, p. 22) we can just follow and perhaps accept what others, e.g., speech act theorists, have observed about them in the literature. One may then conclude that with the definition (M) of one meter sketched above, what happens is that one meter through that utterance comes to be the length of the indicated bar, that this may be a change in what the term "one meter" denotes, and that this change is effectuated by this vary declaration. Notice that such a definition or declaration does not do away with all that was part of the established meaning of the term before. The term still serves as a unit of measurement regarding lengths, and the very definition is most probably interpreted best as a precisification, or standardization, of a meaning that was until then left relatively indeterminate. Its overall role in our linguistic practices, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic by and large remains the same.

I will not here follow Lewis adagium to the end, though. I believe it to be wholesome already to, for the time being, conclude that propositions are not the kinds of things that are of any help in explaining what declarations do. The question what, then, serves as the semantic content of declarations, if it is not some content declared true, I leave for another occasion. Some reflections on this issue are left for the final section of this paper. Instead, it proves to be worthwhile, in the next and main section of this paper, to generalize the current findings to types of discourse where the presumed idea of a propositional content can also be seen to obscure the discussion. In the next section I will argue that certain philosophically and linguistically problematic evaluative statements in coordinative discourse, upon their intuitive understanding, are more like the declarative uses of sentences, rather than like the descriptive ones, and that it is actually already revealing to acknowledge this.

3 Agreement and Truth

Evaluative discourse is often understood to be concerned with matters of taste and opinion and related to moral and aesthetic standards. It can be properly subsumed under the umbrella of what we here want to call *coordinative discourse*, for reasons that will hopefully become clear by the end of this section. The class of uses of expressions that this term can be taken to cover also comprises the types of baptisms and definitions that have been addressed in the previous section, as well as directive uses of expressions that arguably relate to future contingencies, besides the samples of evaluative discourse that we want to focus upon first.

In this section I will first summarize, briefly and sketchily, a variety of proposals that have been made to deal with utterances with such a, claimed evaluative, nature, and indicate, in line with the findings of the previous section, what I take to be a common underlying and mistaken assumption. I will argue that particular kinds of evaluative discourse that have been debated in the philosophical and linguistic literature do not, as has been argued, invoke faultlessly disagreeable judgements about the assessment relative truth of propositions of any identifiable kind. It is, I argue, the very notion of a proposition itself that should be deemed to be assessment relative.

As has already been stated above, for a proposition to emerge, its defining

terms have to be agreed upon. Cases of faultless disagreement, so-called, therefore do not display any conflict about the truth, relative or not, of some propositional content that is under dispute, but they are disagreements about the subsequent meaning and use of the terms, a kind of agreement which is required to eventually define any such propositional contents. By the end of this section I will generalize the conclusions somewhat from the quite particular subject of predicates of personal taste and analogous predicates, to that of the possible coordinative use of all sorts of indicative sentences.

3.1 Indexical Contextualism

Evaluative language, like personal-taste talk, moral speech, and aesthetic discourse, poses the challenge of explaining cases of what Max Kölbel has aptly, and provocatively perhaps, dubbed “faultless disagreement”. (Kölbel 2004) These are cases in which two or more agents entertain and support apparently conflicting propositions arguably without any one of them being at fault. The two may literally contradict each other as in the typical piece of discourse below.

“This piece of cake is tasty.”

“No, it is not.”

“Yes, it is.”

Despite the apparent contradiction, the situation is assumed to be such that we witness an exchange whereby not one of the two interlocutors can be blamed to be wrong. Each one of the participants may of course firmly believe the other to be wrong, and this is why they each may feel the urge to contradict the other, even though, speaking somewhat impartially, as an outside observer, we cannot say that either one of them is plainly wrong. Of course, neither do we want to simply agree that both are right.

The phenomenon or appearance of faultless disagreement is not as marginal as it might appear at first sight, because the kinds of disagreements are not restrictively concerned with just our taste of just food. They show up in all kinds of qualifications that we can make in all types of discourse. The example above might equally well have started with “This piece of music is funky,” or “This professor is an expert,” or “This piece of reasoning is valid,” etc., and also then it might have continued in the way we witness above and give rise to completely analogous

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observations and questions. Notice that if it were settled, or simply a fact of the matter, what TASTY really is, or what is FUNKY, or what makes someone an EXPERT, or what VALIDITY OF REASONING consists in, then there would be a correct answer to the question whether the designated specimen has the attributed property, and at least one of the contestants would have to be wrong, i.e., not faultless. Notice also that such a settlement of fact might depend on standards merely contextually given. However, when we fail such standards, if there is no objective or intersubjective fact of the matter, then none of the contestants can be blamed for being wrong, and the *disagreements* can be seen to be *faultless*.

There is quite some debate in the literature the last two decades or so about how to best understand the phenomenon of *faultless disagreement* (Kölbel 2004; MacFarlane 2014; Lasersohn 2017) or the *mere appearance of it* (Stojanovic 2007; López de Sa 2008; Schaffer 2011). It is quite generally taken for granted that the truth of evaluative utterances, or of their contents, is or is understood to be dependent on tastes, standards, perspectives, judges or assessors, It is also quite generally taken for granted that in most evaluative discourse concerned certain propositions or propositional contents are expressed, and that the issues relate to the truth of these contents. While I eventually aim to deny the very assumption in the cases for which the term *faultless disagreement* is employed, it will prove worthwhile to profile my point against some positions taken in the debates, a debate I want to present here as one centering around (possibly indexical) contextualism on the one hand, in the remainder of this subsection, and (assessment or truth) relativism on the other, in the next subsection.⁸ I will start with the first type of approach. I will henceforth employ the abbreviation *FDU* for a *faultlessly disagreeable utterance*, or, if one wants, an utterance that is understood that way.

On various contextualist approaches sentences containing predicates of personal taste are used to express regular propositions, which are obtained by means of filling some possibly hidden parameters. Their initial concern is with assertions

⁸*Contextualism* and *relativism* are here employed as generic terms that serve to indicated two poles in a landscape of approaches also featuring *non-indexical contextualism*, *moderate relativism*, *content relativism*, *expressivism* perhaps, and what have you. It is expedient not to get lost in the details of these individual approaches, because the main aim of the discussion here is merely to identify and undo a common assumption that I believe is characteristically underlying all such approaches. In order to avoid confusion it must be noted, though, that what sometimes goes under the label of “nonindexical *contextualism*” is taken to count as a form of relativism here.

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of the form “ x is *PPT*”, where “ x ” serves to name or demonstrate some object or intended referent, and where “*PPT*” is a predicate of personal taste, or some other subjective or evaluative predicate. The assertions are taken to state that the denoted object is *PPT* to the speaker, or relative to some subject, judge, standard somehow determined contextually. The same goes mutatis mutandis for evaluative sentences that are taken to express moral and normative opinions, epistemic modals, and very other types of discourse with an arguably subjective component. (See, e.g., Glanzberg 2007; Stojanovic 2007; López de Sa 2008; Schaffer 2011, and, arguably, Stephenson 2007.)

Utterances of the above form can be typically replied to with “Yes, I agree, x is *PPT*”, but also with “Yes, to you, but x is not *PPT* to me.” So much seems quite uncontroversial. The contextualist analyses do however not, or not obviously, apply to cases in which the utterance is taken to be one the interlocutors disagree with, as in “No, x is not *PPT*” and it is this type of disagreement which the rival relativists claim to understand differently.

Let me point out first that there is, of course, nothing wrong in itself with some parametrized type of interpretation and a relativized notion of truth. Such concepts play a familiar role in the philosophy of language and in linguistics, where worlds, times, contexts, and/or (sequences of) objects are taken to play their part as constituents or parameters in the truth-conditional evaluation of sentences. (Montague 1974; Kaplan 1979; Stalnaker 1978; Lewis 1981, *amo.*) There is no intrinsic reason not to parametrize truth to judges, perspectives, or contexts of assessment.

It seems, however, that there is a marked difference between the familiar forms of relativization and the ones that are adduced now in order to deal with evaluative discourse. In the familiar types of examples of context relativity the semantic parameters are properly conceived of as being described or characterized by the resulting propositions, as contributing proper constituents to them and as setting certain standards of evaluation. The parameters are taken to contribute, substantially, to propositional content. Judges, perspectives, or assessments, however, appear to be understood differently.

If, for instance, it is said that `Iam.tall` this can be judged true because, e.g., it correctly characterizes the actual world, at a definite time, and a speaker, in a context, who has a length exceeding a certain threshold, in that context. It can also be used to inform one about what, in the current context, the standard of tallness

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actually is. (See, e.g., (Barker 2002), and also below, section 3.3.) However, if some person states that *The_cake_is_tasty* it is not generally taken to be an assertion, accurate or inaccurate, about the judge or assessor, and her judgment about the cake. But this is precisely what, upon the contextualists analysis, the utterances is taken mean.

A standard objection to a contextualist approach therefore runs like this:

The indexical hypothesis says that the propositions expressed by

(1a) Anna (in C1): ‘Depp is more handsome than Pitt.’

(1b) Barbara (in C2): ‘Depp is not more handsome than Pitt.’

respectively are not contradictory—they could both be true at once. As a consequence the indexical hypothesis predicts that Barbara could come to accept what Anna has asserted (and vice versa) without changing her mind. However, in reality it is clear that Barbara cannot come to accept what Anna has said without changing her mind. (Kölbel 2008, §3)

Peter Lasersohn has put it, more succinctly, as follows:

Unfortunately, this analysis has an obvious problem — namely that it fails to account for the intuition that if John says ‘Licorice is tasty’ and Mary says ‘Licorice is not tasty,’ they are contradicting each other. (Lasersohn 2017, p. 19)

The problem, in brief, is that a contextualist approach has no direct or obvious explanation of any *FDU*. Essentially similar concerns have been ventilated, quite elaborately, by quite a few others, e.g., Kölbel 2004, §IV, Lasersohn 2005, §3&4.1, Schaffer 2011, §4 and MacFarlane 2014, §1.2.

The above criticism of the contextualist may be correct, but a contextualist need not take it as a criticism. A typical contextualist reply is that a failure to account for *FDUs* is not problematic because there are actually no *FDUs*. Like any propositions classically conceived, the contextualist propositions have the distinctive property of being true, or being false, and it is not possible for someone to faultlessly consider one true and for someone else to faultlessly consider the same proposition false. If a proposition is correctly, faultlessly, considered true, and a proposition is correctly, faultlessly, considered false, they are distinct propositions.

Isidora Stojanovic thus argues “that disagreement is never faultless: either the two parties genuinely disagree, hence if the one is right then the other is wrong, or the two parties are both right, but their apparent disagreement boils down to a misunderstanding.” (p. 691) “Disagreement is genuine only when the one party’s being right entails that the other party is wrong.” (Stojanovic 2007, p. 692) Michael Glanzberg is also pertinent about there actually not being faultlessly disagreeable utterances.

From a traditional, non-relativist, point of view, this idea [of there being faultless disagreement, PD] is prima facie absurd: if two propositions express disagreement, one must fail to be correct. (...) My own inclination is to side with the traditional view, and reject the notion of faultless disagreement as absurd. (Glanzberg 2007, p. 16)

The authors, among several others, therefore present various attempts to explain *the appearance* of a disagreement in other ways.

For the purpose of the current paper we need not go into further details and extensions of the various contextualist approaches, but it may suffice to emphasize two points. First, if it is characteristic of a proposition to have a determinate truth value, then it cannot be the object of a faultless disagreement. Second, as contextualists and also their critics appear to agree, there is no, classical or contextualist, proposition that contestants are disagreeing about in case of an apparent *FDU*.

3.2 Assessment Relativism

Relativists are not generally satisfied with the contextualists’ denial of the possibility of faultless disagreement, and their notion of content in particular.

I believe it to be a distinct disadvantage of indexical relativism [what is called “contextualism” here, PD] that it has to deny that there is any difference between believing that Matisse is better and believing that one prefers him. (Kölbel 2004, p. 63-4)

Relativists have instead set out to preserve the idea that there is genuine propositional disagreement, that in the kind of evaluative discourse at hand certain propositions or propositional contents are expressed, and that the disagreements concern the truth of these contents. Such an, apparently classical, point of view is then

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made to allow for faultless disagreement, by conceiving of these contents as only being true relative to a perspective, or judge, or taste, or just *assessment-relative*. Such a view has been advanced by a variety of authors.

The relativism I am considering does not claim that the content expressed varies with context of utterance, but rather that the truth-value of the content itself is relative. (...) [T]he same proposition can be evaluated differently in different perspectives. (Kölbel 2004, p. 72)

We can make sense of [an FDU], that is, if we relativize not what is said by sentences such as 'Mary is rich', but the truth of what is said. (Richard 2004, p. 225)

For now we are interested in the idea (...) that propositions only determine truth values relative to something much more fine-grained than a world. (Egan & Weatherson 2005, p. 158)

All we have to do is (...) contextually relativize the assignment of truth values to contents, so that the same content may be assigned different truth values relative to different individuals. This will allow for the possibility that two utterances express identical semantic content, but with one of them true and the other one false. (Lasersohn 2005, p. 662)

[T]he sentence [an FDU] expresses the same proposition whenever used, but that proposition varies in truth-value with a standard of taste, so that the proposition can be true relative to one standard of taste and false relative to another. (Kölbel 2008, p. 5)

According to truth-value relativism, there is no absolute fact of the matter about whether a proposition, as used at a particular context, is true; it can be true as assessed from one context and false as assessed from another. (MacFarlane 2014, p. 73)

Peter Lasersohn and John MacFarlane can be credited for having carried out the impressive task of elaborating, motivating and defining, a semantic architecture that arguably implements these ideas. (Lasersohn 2005; Lasersohn 2017; MacFarlane 2014) The enterprise, however, comes at some cost, a conceptual cost. To make sense of the newly introduced concept of a proposition, a concept of a proposition or of a propositional content that is said to be only relatively true or false.

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In the previous section, and like the contextualists, we started out with a characterization of propositions as the kinds of things that are true or false. This characterization will not do for the things that are supposed to be considered the objects of faultless disagreement now, which are taken to be the kinds of things that are said to be relatively true or relatively false. John MacFarlane acknowledges some such as one of his major tasks.

Perhaps the most pressing worry about relativism about truth is that it is not clear what it means to call a proposition ‘true for Sal’ or ‘true relative to Sal’s tastes.’ (...) The relativist needs an account of propositions that allows them to be “merely relatively true.” (MacFarlane 2014, p. 39, 43)

In (MacFarlane 2014), John MacFarlane indeed sets out to show, with admirable nuance, how to go about “making sense of relative truth” and he proves to be quite successful in making intuitive sense of such “talk of truth relative to a context of assessment”⁹ and of “the view that assessment-sensitive sentences express propositions that are themselves assessment-sensitive”.¹⁰ However, it appears that in doing so he eventually has little to say in particular about the propositional contents themselves that are said to be relatively true.¹¹ Surely the book, and much related literature, supplies informal attempts to intuitively identify or denote the propositions under discussion, and the following, compiled, *position statement* may, I think, be taken to exemplify the assessments relativists’ view, as well as what I find problematic about it.

⁹Said to be the main task of the first half of the book. (MacFarlane 2014, p. 23)

¹⁰Which is what chapter 4, “Propositions”, is almost entirely devoted to. (MacFarlane 2014, p. 76)

¹¹Such can be truly distinct issues. In my (Dekker 2017b) I have tried to demonstrate that, while I fail to be able to make sense of *non-existent objects*, I do want, and also feel quite able, to make sense of *talk about non-existent objects*. Surely the type of talk exists, and makes sense, even if the objects don’t. I can likewise make sense of what a relativist says when talking about propositions that are only relatively true, while I find it hard to make any sense of such propositions themselves.

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Assessment-relativism is not relativist concerning content. Different utterances of the same sentence yield the same proposition in different contexts, but their truth-value can be different if evaluated from different contexts of assessment. So if Robin says, “This cake is tasty”, and Joris says, “This cake is not tasty”, both relate to the same proposition $\langle \mathbf{d}, \text{TASTY} \rangle$, where \mathbf{d} is the demonstrated piece of cake. This is a proposition that is true if evaluated with Robin serving as the assessor or judge or standard, and that is false if it is Joris that is taken to figure that way. (A Compilation, 2021)

Such a position statement is typical in the sense of adequately characterizing the relativist’s view, I believe, but also in the sense of actually providing a misleading characterization of the relativist’s concept of a proposition. Let us first think of how we normally tend to characterize propositions.

I think many scholars, but also many users of ordinary English, can do fairly well in providing a fairly acceptable circumscription of the propositions that are expressed. Suppose, e.g., it is said `John.is.a.lecturer`, and suppose, for the sake of the argument, it can be assumed that we know, in the very context, who John is, e.g., \mathbf{j} , and which property is ascribed to him, e.g., the property *LECT* of being a lecturer. We then can characterize the proposition as the proposition that that John is that kind of lecturer, or as the set of possible worlds in which that is so, or, for instance, as the structured proposition $\langle \mathbf{j}, \text{LECT} \rangle$.¹² With respect to the very statement of the latter proposition, but also with respect to that of the other two, we thereby assume we know sufficiently well who \mathbf{j} is, and what *LECT* is. We do not have to assume that we have full knowledge of the two, something which is probably impossible, but we do have to assume at least that we agree that, and how, the two are delineated, to a sufficient extent, in the discourse context.

In the position statement above, and with the alleged faultlessly disagreeable proposition that is proposed there, some such assumption is not warranted. If one wants to identify whatever object by means of the quasi-formal “ $\langle \mathbf{d}, \text{TASTY} \rangle$ ”, one only succeeds if we can assume we agree what “ \mathbf{d} ” and “*TASTY*” stand for. (And similarly for any proposition indicated by the locution “that that is tasty.”) Now, as said, we generally start out assuming we agree on the subject \mathbf{d} of such

¹²It really does not matter here which type of analysis one prefers. The latter proposition can also, perhaps, be analyzed further.

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propositions, so there is no problem about that. But what “TASTY” in the position statement means is apparently subject to disagreement. It is assumed that we, or the interlocutors, do not agree on what the predicate applies to, which is fairly indicative of disagreement about its meaning. So if one says that the proposition that constitutes the subject of an alleged faultless disagreement is $\langle \mathbf{d}, TASTY \rangle$, we can nominally agree of course, but substantially we actually disagree about what that proposition is.

We can of course ask the assessment relativist what they mean by, in particular, “TASTY” in “ $\langle \mathbf{d}, TASTY \rangle$ ”. It will not do then, of course, for the assessment relativist, to supply all samples of things that are “TASTY” because that would render the property and the proposition no longer faultlessly evaluable in various ways. They might also reply with “Well, you know what “TASTY” stands for, or shut up.” Such would be rude, but effective, in ordinary circumstances, outside of the context of disagreements. However, now that the question, explicitly, is what “TASTY” stands for such a reply would be begging the question. But then, if this is correct, it seems the expression “ $\langle TASTY, \mathbf{d} \rangle$ ” cannot be taken to in effect denote anything like a proposition.

Start of Digression. Allow me to digress a bit on the, presumed, understanding of this predicate “TASTY”. Let us assume that Robin has expressed the proposition $\langle \mathbf{d}, TASTY \rangle$ which she, as assessor, faultlessly judges true, and which Joris, as assessor, faultlessly judges false. What quality or property can Robin thereby be taken to attribute to the cake? It is a property that the cake must be taken to have according to her, and which the cake must be taken to fail according to Joris. Since the assessments are faultless we must assume that the cake truly has the property relative to Robin, and that it truly fails the property relative to Joris.

This property cannot be one that the cake has or fails, per se, because the cake is supposed to have (or fail) the property only in relation to Robin (or Joris). Neither can the property be that of being judged tasty by Robin, because that is a property that the cake, by stipulation, is taken to have, so there is no disagreement about that. It seems that the situation is kind of like one in which we are judging the cake from different angles.¹³ But then, what appears to be a relative having of the property must really be a non-relative standing in a relation. Robin stands in

¹³Like what appears left of the tree to me, appears right from it to you, when we are viewing it from opposing points of view.

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the FIND IT TASTY-relation with the cake, and this is a property that the cake has; Joris does not stand in the same FIND IT TASTY-relation with the cake, so this is a property that the cake fails. These are, however, two different qualities of the cake: one that it has, and a different one that it fails. It will surely not do to conceive of these two distinct qualities as one. If one were to say that the cake has a “property” like that of BEING FOUND TASTY relative to Robin, and also not have that “property” relative to Joris, this only serves to show it is not a property, but a mix up of two.

We can, of course, relativize judgments about the truth of sentences, and about the proper application of predicates, to assessors. However, if, on the one hand, we leave it to one assessor to decide what is their truth and proper use, then there is, by that determination, nothing left for us to faultlessly disagree with. If, on the other hand, truth and proper use are left undecided, if we for instance do not agree about what property a thing is supposed to have to deserve to be subsumed under a predicate, then, obviously, there is no proposition to the effect that a thing has that property. A property that a thing has, to me, and not has, to you, is not really a property, and therefore a proposition to the effect that a certain thing has that property to me, but not to you, is not a proposition either. *End of Digression.*

The conceptual worries ventilated here may only serve to indicate some intuitive and informal qualms about the relativists’ propositions and properties, but they can be substantiated further if we inspect the specific ways in which Peter Lasersohn and John Macfarlane formally flesh out their proposals themselves. Both actually do also provide some formal, model-theoretic, answers to the question what kind of things the above relativists’ propositions and properties are.¹⁴

The propositions that are expressed by sentences—determined relative to some context of use and perhaps a variable assignment—are modeled as sets of triples consisting of a world, time and an assessment parameter—an assessor, a taste, or judge, or whatever perspective it requires.¹⁵ Such sets, or functionally / logically

¹⁴MacFarlane has not actually defined the notion of a proposition, or of a propositional content, but only what he has called *Intensions of Contents*, where propositions must be assumed to be the contents of sentences. (MacFarlane 2014, p. 130, and more elaborately on p. 152.) He does employ some notation device to denote contents, at a context of use and under an assignment, but without any further formal explanation.

¹⁵Actually they are the characteristic functions of such sets, functions from such triples to truth values. I take these to be equivalent logically speaking.

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equivalent objects, are, or model, properties of assessors (tastes, ...).¹⁶ If such a set P is taken to supply or model the content of an utterance `THIS IS TASTY`, it defines the property of being an assessor judging \mathbf{d} tasty, where \mathbf{d} is assumed to be object demonstrated. It is precisely that property that an assessor a has in a world w at a time t if, and only if, the triple $\langle w, t, a \rangle \in P$. Aligning with old-school terminology, the corresponding, characterizing, function P' associates any assessor a with the old-school proposition $P'(a)$ that consists of the set of world and time pairs where a is so to speak satisfied by \mathbf{d} . Likewise, a predicate like `tasty` expresses, or has as intension of its content, what in old-school terminology is understood to be a *relation in intension*. It can be conceived of as a function R that associates any object x and assessor a with the proposition $R(\langle x, a \rangle)$ which consists of the world w and time t pairs such that a judges x tasty in w at t .

For sure these relativist *propositions* and *properties*, as could have been expected, really are, in familiar terminology, `PROPERTIES` and `RELATIONS`, respectively. But such may serve to demonstrate that in particular the former do not serve to intuitively constitute objects of (faultless) disagreement. People can be said to have beliefs and disagreements about whether or not properties apply to objects, or about what objects or kinds of objects those properties should be applied to, and these are also the things that are asserted. Properties and objects do not however by themselves figure this way. The main worry, formally now, is that the relativists' propositions, which are properties, are not genuinely and intuitively considered to be objects of belief and assertion and disagreement. Intuitively, what people believe, assert and disagree about is objects having properties and this is what a disagreement may be about. Not about the properties per se.¹⁷

The above is not to disqualify the merits of the work of Lasersohn and MacFarlane. However, despite all the valuable things they contribute to our understanding and assessment of *FDUs*, they do not succeed, I believe, in articulating a concept of a proposition that may serve as an object of belief, assertion and disagreement.

¹⁶They are logically speaking equivalent to functions from assessors to old-fashioned propositions, sets of world and time pairs.

¹⁷This can be seen to be confirmed, not disconfirmed, by Lewis' arguments that the objects of beliefs, among others, are properties, because these properties must be understood to be believed or asserted only in self-ascriptions. (Lewis 1979) Lewis doesn't wonder about, and assert, the possibility or impossibility of the property of being a poached egg itself. He wonders about, and asserts, the possibility or impossibility of `HE HIMSELF BEING` a poached egg.

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In (Lasersohn 2005) Peter Lasersohn succeeds in picturing faultless disagreements as involving contradictions, because in his approach, they involve the assertion of propositions that are incompatible *properties*, so that, e.g., the one *assertion* invokes the model-theoretic (set-theoretic) complement of the other. (Lasersohn 2005, p. 663, 667) But notice that these objects, as we have seen, actually are properties that one disagreeing agent applies to one subject (taste, judge, standard, or context of assessment), and that the other agent applies to another. They are therefore just as ‘contradictory’ as those of the contextualists, or as are the utterances *Don’t walk.* and *Fred doesn’t.*¹⁸ In (Lasersohn 2017) Lasersohn therefore reconstrues the disagreements as disagreements about the taste or judge or assessor parameter, a disagreement about what the proposition, which is a property, should apply to. (Lasersohn 2017, p. 156, p. 170) So, eventually, the concept of a proposition that is actually a property, thus, does not constitute an object of disagreement, but, at most, a subject of it.

(MacFarlane 2014, Ch. 6) in its turn meticulously identifies and investigates various possible forms of disagreement, so as to profile and oppose various forms of objectivism, contextualism and relativism, and of course, also in all these explorations and explications his “intensions of propositions” play a role. However, the point of these disagreements is never whether these intensions are true or false. Also here, it so turns out to be, it is, generally speaking, about the assessability of these intensions of propositions, about their tenability and accuracy relative to varying contexts of assessment. MacFarlane thus scrutinizes how the properties, that these propositions really are, may and may not get applied. Throughout these propositions, so-called, are not the object of the various disagreements, but at best a kind of subject matter of them.

Wrapping up the main results of these two subsections, it seems it simply has not been shown that there is a kind of proposition that can be said to constitute the objects of faultless disagreement. Along with the relativists I believe that there are genuine cases of faultless disagreement, and along with the contextualists and the relativists I believe that these cannot be taken to be concerned with the truth of propositions, traditionally conceived. Disagreeing with both, I believe they are not disagreements about any propositions at all.

¹⁸Or Robin’s assertion that the *find-it-tasty*-relation holds between her, or her assessor, and the cake, and Joris’ assertion that it does not hold between her (Joris, or Joris’ assessor) and the cake.

3.3 PROPOSITIONS and *Propositions*

In the previous section I have argued that it is indeed hard to make sense of the supposed propositional contents of assertions and beliefs, if their truth or accuracy is assessment relative. In this section, I argue, more radically, and in line with what we said in the first section, that in discussing *FDUs* one better not speak of propositional contents in the first place. I want to clarify how we nevertheless can make *philosophical sense* of the notion of assessment-relative truth. Instead of considering truth a relative property of propositions, we simply have to realize that it is the PROPOSITIONS themselves that are relative. They are relative to the (assumed) agreement on the meanings of the terms in which they are stated, on the assumed tastes, or judges, or relative to, let us say, the assumed *standards* for them. *FDUs* can be taken to contribute to establishing (further) agreement about these terms, so that they, next, can be used to state propositions.

In the discussion so far I have made and maintained two assumptions. In the first place, in cases of possibly faultless disagreement, there is disagreement, at least implicitly, about the meaning, or extension, of a predicate, like “tasty”, or “funky”, or “expert”, etc. Consequently, when someone, in a case of possibly faultless disagreement, judges a piece of music to be funky, the FUNKY that an assessor judges it to be must be different from the FUNKY that a counter-assessor judges the music *not* to be.¹⁹ The kind of FUNKY that one judges this music to be includes this music in its extension, while the kind of FUNKY that the other judges the music NOT to be does not include it. The two of them have, as ordinary wisdom would have it, *a different idea of funky*.²⁰

Secondly, if we cannot assume we agree about what FUNKY is, there is no point in debating the question whether or not some particular piece of music is that kind of FUNKY — for the simple reason that there is no THAT KIND OF FUNKY. Consequently, if we fail to agree on a constituent term of an utterance That *is* funky

¹⁹What is TASTY FOR ME is in such cases assumed to be different from what is TASTY FOR YOU.

²⁰This assumption aligns quite with what David Plunkett and Tim Sundell observe about what they call a “meta-linguistic dispute” or “negotiation”, specimens of discourse that *FDUs* for them are a typical example of. They consider it “a key feature” that “the speakers (...) do not mean (in the relevant sense) the same things by their words.” (Plunkett & Sundell 2013, §4). “[T]here is good evidence that speakers in the dispute mean different things by (at least) one of the terms in that dispute.” (Plunkett 2015, p. 847) “[T]hey disagree about what the word “tall” means in this context.” (Plunkett 2015, p. 837) We come back to the *metalinguistic* approaches in the next subsection.

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then it fails to state a PROPOSITION. Recall what we earlier said we assumed about propositions, and that we have to assume we agree, to a contextually sufficient extent, on the meanings of the terms in which those propositions are stated. If such contextually relevant agreement fails, as it does in cases of faultless disagreement, then we don't have just a PROPOSITION the truth of which is relative to whatever assessor, but we don't have any PROPOSITION at all.

What does this imply for the concept of a proposition, and the idea of relative truth? If we have establishment agreement, --or if we can assume we did so, and even if it is only contextually satisfactory agreement--, we can legitimately raise the question whether or not a certain piece of music is that kind of FUNKY. Just as we must suppose we agree on what counts as a CAR, SCREWDRIVER, TOMATO, if we want to discuss the issue of whether someone has any one of these available. Once the standards or assessment criteria are assumed to be agreed upon, standards or criteria according to which the terms of a proposition can be evaluated, a PROPOSITION can be stated, and its truth, while perhaps not obvious, must be determinate. And only on such a supposition can we consider the issue whether the PROPOSITION that a certain piece music is that kind of funky is true or not. If, however, standards or assessment criteria are not agreed upon, or if contextually assumed standards don't decide a case on a given occasion, then there is no PROPOSITION, but at best a propositional function relative to how the standards or criteria can be fixed. Depending on which standard (judge, perspective, assessor, ...) one agrees upon, a different PROPOSITION ensues. The notion of a PROPOSITION itself, thus, is relative to such agreement.

It is, thus, in this derivative sense, that truth can be seen to be a relative notion. The truth of a proposition can be seen to be relative, not because there is a PROPOSITION the truth of which is relative, but because the PROPOSITION is relative. There can be a PROPOSITION only relative to a context, an assessor, or, just more generally, relative to some agreement on the terms of a proposition. If its terms are properly fixed, however, then a PROPOSITION can as usual be assumed to be determinately true or false.

As indicated above, so, to repeat, I have no intention, nor the need, to define or even redefine or defend any notion of a proposition. I have chosen to stick to the specification of some global characteristics that have shown to be fairly useful, and that are relatively generally acknowledged, intuitively, I think, and in the philosophical tradition. A proposition is a kind of abstract object that the

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users of a language may on occasion assume they agree to be something that is objectively true or false. No matter how such a notion of a proposition is fleshed out further, as a Fregean *Gedanke*, or a Russellian *Structured Proposition*, or a set of possible worlds or a construction of truth makers, I believe it must be obvious that no such proposition can serve as the object of faultless disagreement. If it is something that is faultlessly said to be true, it cannot reasonably be something that is also faultlessly said not to be true.²¹

Now that we have established what it is that *FDUs* don't do—assert relativist propositions—, it is time to establish some idea of what they do do. Before we proceed with this investigation is it expedient to agree on some notation conventions. Here, in what follows and above, I use `type_writer_font` to indicate the actual locutions that may be used in an assertion to express PROPOSITIONS, indicated by SMALL CAPS, that is, if the interlocutors can be assumed to assume they agree on the meaning of the terms in (and syntax of) the expression employed. The locution `This_is_tasty` then can be assumed to denote the PROPOSITION that what `this` denotes, or what it is that is assumed to be agreed upon that it denotes, has the property expressed by `tasty`, or, rather, the property that is assumed to be agreed upon that *tasty* designates. If the interlocutors can be assumed to not assume they agree on the meaning of the terms employed, what results is what I indicate here as a *proposition*, in *italics*. As stated above, without any assumed agreement about the terms employed, the locution then cannot be taken to issue a PROPOSITION. So the question now becomes how do we then assess or evaluate such a *proposition*?

When issuing a *propositions*, a locution is presented as being true. It should not however be taken to assert the truth of what the locution is taken to state, but it should be taken as a proposal to declare the locution true. A *proposition* more or less corresponds to the intuitive concept of a proposal, or the usual business

²¹Aristotle famously observed, not merely the principle of non-contradiction, a principle that Plato has also shown to be aware of, but the fact that the proper formulation of the principle requires one to fill in all possibly, logically required, parameters relative to which what it is that is said to be the case, cannot also be said to be *not the case* too. (“It is impossible for the same attribute at once to belong and not to belong to the same thing in the same relation *and we must add any further qualifications that may be necessary to meet logical objections.*” Aristotle 1933, IV, my emphasis.) A contradiction only arises when logically required parameters of evaluation or interpretation are fixed. Such is to say, in my terminology, that the constituents in terms of which the proposition is defined are all (assumed to be) settled and agreed upon.

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concept of a proposition that is staged, possibly made explicit for instance by a performative locution: “I propose to you: . . .” An ordinary example is, for instance, “(I propose to you.) This is your desk.” A *proposition* is not, like a PROPOSITION, the kind of thing that is TRUE or FALSE, but it is the kind of thing that can be accepted or *agreed* with. It can also be ignored, or rejected, in case it is *disagreed* with.

Let us consider some elementary example. Assume Robin honestly and sincerely states that “This piece of music is really funky.” Suppose Joris reacts with: “No, it really is not.” Let us assume the two agree on what exactly they are listening to, the music, and even on its sound. What Robin hears is really funky, to her, so this is why she has said so. Joris disagrees. What she hears is really not funky, to her, and this is why she has said so.

If there is any disagreement, what the two disagree about is not what it is that they are hearing. We proceeded on the assumption that they agreed about that. They also do not disagree about how each one of them appreciates and qualifies the music. What they disagree about is how it ought to be classified. Robin’s idea of funky is that this music is of *that*, her, kind, and Joris’ idea of funky is that the same music is not of *that*, Joris’, kind. They have a different idea of funky and can be taken to disagree about what funky really is. Each one of the two wants to share her idea of funky with the other, or impose it on her. So this is why Robin *propose* that Joris, like Robin, classifies this piece of music as funky, and Joris, in turn, *proposes* that Robin, like Joris, classifies this piece of music as not funky.

The two can agree that the PROPOSITION that it is funky_{according to Robin’s standards} is TRUE and that the PROPOSITION that it is funky_{according to Joris’ standards} is FALSE. They can also agree that there is no agreed upon standard idea of funky, so that there is no PROPOSITION that it is funky_{according to THE standard}. Obviously there is also no PROPOSITION that it is funky_{according to no standard}. Thus, as has already been stated, there is just no PROPOSITION that the two disagree about. However, there are obviously two conflicting *propositions*, conflicting, because one cannot consistently agree with both.

Robin’s idea of funky is such that the music is funky, whence her *proposition* that the music is funky. Her *proposition* is that the music should be categorized as belonging to the funky stuff so that it should be funky to Joris, too. Joris’ idea of funky is such that it is not, whence her conflicting *proposition* that the music is not funky. Joris’ *proposition* is that the music should not be categorized as belonging to the funky stuff, so that it should not be funky to Robin either. None of the two

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can, upon pain of inconsistency, *agree* with both *propositions*.

So what do they do? They can *agree to disagree*, and nobody will be wronged or hurt.²² Such would actually imply the cancellation of both *propositions*. They can also seek to advance an *agreement*, and try and synchronize on a standard solid enough to yield a PROPOSITION that the music is funky_{according to that standard}. This would enable them to properly coordinate their discourse in these matters.

It is another question, of course, how the two might actually go about achieving such a synchronization. Such can be achieved in various ways. One might surrender to the other's more distinguished musical taste, or vice versa; one of the two may employ brute force, or employ her authority, or start a deliberation, a socratic method, – any other way may do. How they actually proceed, and what the result of this should be, that cannot however be a topic of this paper. What counts in the current investigation is just this. A faultless disagreement is about conflicting *propositions*, not PROPOSITIONS. No matter how a faultless disagreement dissolves, it is not a matter of finding out what the facts ARE, but of deciding what the facts *will be*. The issue is not one of being right, but one of getting right.

My view that *FDUs* involve certain proposal is not entirely new of course. Mark Richard described essentially the same view in similar terms.

In saying that Mary is rich, I am inviting you to think of being rich in such a way that Mary counts as rich. If you accept my invitation – that is, if you don't demur, and carry on the conversation – that sets the standards for wealth, for the purposes of the conversation, so as to make what I say true. It is this idea – that an assertion can be as much an invitation to conceptualize things in a certain way, as a representation of how things are – that is missing from the picture of assertion on which the objection rests. (Richard 2004, p. 226)

I could no more than agree, except for the fact that Richard here still speaks of an assertion. I hope it is obvious by now that I would deem it misguided to speak of an assertion in the cases at hand. What could possibly be the content of the assertion,

²²Each one of the two then sticks to their own initial judgement, viz., that this music really is (not-) funky. So Robin may conclude that “OK. (But it really is funky.)” while Joris may agree that “Fine. (But it really is not.)”

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if the interlocutor first has to accept the mentioned invitation before she can make out what the envisaged assertion asserts?²³

I hope it will be clear that the sort of *propositions* that I observe in the cases discussed—and given the sketched characterization—, can easily be seen to be faultless in an obvious and intuitive sense, and also that that they invoke disagreement. They are *faultless* in the sense that they are by definition unable to portray reality incorrectly, simply because they are not intended to portray reality at all. Of course one may quarrel and disagree about whether they are good proposals, whether it is conceptually or socially desirable, or objectionable, to accept certain *propositions*, but there are, I believe, no linguistic norms forbidding any *proposition* to the effect that any predicate or term has, for the time being, any kind of meaning.²⁴ The kind of correctness characteristic of any PROPOSITIONAL, or representational, use of language is absent from any *propositional* use.

Propositions may also, obviously, and typically, yield disagreement, be it not the kind of disagreement that we have about facts. To *propose* that this piece of music be called funky, and to *propose* that it not be called so, is clearly inconsistent. It would be inconsistent to accept both. Observe that the *propositions* concerned should not be taken to be assertions about what should be the case.²⁵ If one of them were an assertion about what is actually the right thing to do, it would be

²³Also John McFarlane has hinted at the fact that *FDUs* may be conceived of as proposals for change.

[Joris] has an attitude towards [the cake] that [Robin] cannot coherently take on board herself without changing her own attitudes towards [the cake]. Even if [Robin] does not disagree with anything [Joris] believes, then, there may be reason for them to argue. [Robin] may want to change [Joris]'s attitude about [the cake], making it congruent with her own, and to do this she may try to call [Joris]'s attention to various salient facts about the [the cake]. These facts will play a role much like that of premises in an argument, except that their intended effect is not a change of belief but a change in taste. (MacFarlane 2014, p. 130, I have changed the parameters-settings of the example so as to align them with those of this paper)

The difference is that MacFarlane thinks of these proposals as only involving a change in attitude, not in public fact. We will come back to this point below.

²⁴Of course there are general societal rules for good social behavior, and e.g., for not raising the suggestion of socially unacceptable associations. It could be quite objectionable, even repulsive, to propose to radically change the meaning of socially and politically charged terms.

²⁵Surely, the employed locutions can be understood that way, but this is not the kind of use that is meant to be under discussion here.

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understood to be true or false. However, in the cases under consideration this is not obviously so. They are intended to make it the case, in our microlanguage as Ludlow would say, that it is so.

The kind of disagreement at stake is like the one we find in practical life all the time. Suppose Robin says: “Let’s go to the beach.” and Joris replies: “No, let’s go to the cinema.” Robin and Joris then are said to disagree, they disagree about what to do. Or one general issues her order “Girls, we launch an attack tomorrow.” and the other replies: “No, we don’t.” The envisaged understanding is one in which the second general aims to overrule the first, an understanding upon which the first may respond, in turn, with: “Oh, yes, we will.” The first general might in that case back up her counter-counter-*proposition* with “I am in charge.” The generals apparently disagree about what the army is up to tomorrow.

Again there can be all kinds of reasons why Robin and Joris can be said to be wrong, for instance because they have not thought things through seriously enough, or because the situation simply does not actually favor any of their proposals. Likewise for the generals. Perhaps they will be discharged this afternoon anyway. However, when they disagree, this is not because they for instance know what is going to happen, and they therefore blame the other for giving the wrong picture of that. They disagree because they propose different things to happen. Similarly, in the case of a *proposition* to call this cake tasty, we have assumed that there is not really any fact of the matter, not a fact about whether this cake actually is tasty, neither about whether it should be called tasty. The point of the *proposition* staged by the locution `This_is_tasty` is that it from now on does count as tasty. It will be a fact, if the *proposition* is accepted and agreed with. But it will not be a fact if it isn’t.²⁶

It may be noticed, finally, that when I have talked about *things to do* here, and discuss disagreement about what to do, I really mean this in a fairly colloquial

²⁶It may be observed that the type of disagreement under consideration here is beyond the scope of the assertion inspired disagreements that we find in the literature. For instance, after having examined various possible explanations of the kinds of disagreement at stake in *FDUs*, Peter Lasersohn concludes “If the sentences don’t even make assertions, it is hard to see in what sense they could contradict each other.” (Lasersohn 2005, p. 658). Neither can our type be of any of the kinds of disagreement that MacFarlane identifies in (MacFarlane 2014, ch. 6), for it does not, or not directly, relate to what the contestants believe or to the issue of whether there is any joint accuracy in what is said. It is about what the contestants propose to be or become actual fact.

sense, and like, e.g. Allan Gibbard, think of these ‘things’ as not necessarily constituting a kind of fact. (Gibbard 2003) They are options. Unlike Gibbard, however, I do not thereby want to commit to the idea that the locutions serve the expression of states of mind. If we disagree in the sense discussed here, we disagree with a joint and public plan or proposal, not, or not directly, with someone’s state of mind. The disagreement is about what is going to be established as fact.

3.4 Coordinating Discourse

The informed reader might feel the inclination to think of my interpretation of *FDUs* as what has been called a “metalinguistic” analysis of them. This is quite understandable, but most certainly not adequate as I would like to argue now.

Chris Barker has discussed uses of the sentence “Feynman is tall” where, in his own words:

I have not provided any new information about the world, or at least no new information about Feynman’s height. (...) My purpose in uttering (1) [Feynmann is tall.] under such circumstances would be nothing more than to communicate something about how to use a certain word appropriately — it would be a metalinguistic use. (Barker 2002, p. 2)

Barker has hereby identified an interesting variety of use, (See (Sundell 2011; Barker 2013) for views alike in observations and spirit.) I however believe he gives only a limited characterization of it.

In the first place, I believe, the type of usage that Barker calls to our attention is not only characteristic of typically vague or evaluative predicates like predicates of personal taste. Often people learn the meanings of terms of art by means of typical examples. “This, this and this is *Rococo*.” as said, e.g., in an educational setting. Such a usage, or understanding, can actually be observed in like every piece of discourse, colloquial, scientific as well as philosophical. One only needs a learning child, or a trainee or intern, that is eavesdropping on the linguistic practices of experienced speakers of a new language, so as to learn their semantic practices, the semantic rules of their new habitat. Everyone of us must have started this way, learning from “This is a cow.” what “cow” means, and everyone may with every change of job or peer group may come to know what the there abiding meaning of uses of “coffee”, and “expert” is.

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In the second place, and as has also actually been observed by Chris Barker himself, the type of usage need not be solely restricted to cases where we can speak of there actually being a precise standard that one is learning about, not even in “the current discourse situation”. (Barker 2013, p. 255–6) The interesting cases are those in which the standard, and, hence, the meaning is still negotiable, so that we can be seen to be in the practice of defining or refining our (use of) language. Mark Richard put something like this as follows.

The extension of ‘rich’ varies across contexts as a result of how individuals within the context use the expression. (...) [R]roughly put, its extension shifts to make sentences in which it is used true, provided no one objects to the use in question. Correlatively, ‘rich’ is subject to “contextual negotiation”: when speakers differ over how it is to be applied to cases, they can and often do attempt to reach a consensus as to how it is to be applied, via examples, argument, mutually agreeable stipulation, and so on.” (Richard 2004, p. 227)

For these reasons it seems to me to be inappropriate to analyze the uses like those mentioned above (always) as metalinguistic ones, as *descriptions* of what the actual proper use of the relevant words is, in English, or even only in the current discourse. Upon Barker’s interpretation of the above locution it serves “to inform discourse participants about the prevailing standards” (Barker 2013, p. 241), that the predicate applies to persons with at least the length of Feynmann. Of course anybody can always understand the sentence that way, but the interesting cases are those in which that understanding is inappropriate. These are the cases in which we can take it to be a *proposition*, like “Let us fix or agree *tall* to be someone with the length of at least Feynmann.” Thus understood, one can accept the *proposition*, perhaps by silent assent, but one can also disagree. It would be odd,, in that case, to say that what is said is true or false.

We certainly and quite rightly believe there to be standards, and surely we often do engage in inform other people of what we think the standard is like. But, upon reflection, there is not, or I cannot believe there is, some, somehow contextually relative, standard of tallness, that the members of the English speaking community try to learn to approximate better. We all engage, every now and then, and again and again, in setting that standard, and we can always disagree with each other when we are doing so. I don’t think we need to thereby assume that our “attempts”

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are right or wrong in the sense of truly or falsely approximating that standard, since there isn't one. Our attempts can only be right or wrong in the sense of giving no good standard to work with.²⁷

The main point of disagreement between Barker's metalinguistic proposal and mine, is that they consider them assertions, that are actually true or false, while I don't.²⁸ As said, there is indeed a metalinguistic understanding of the locution *Feynmann is tall* as, partially, informing us about the actual standards of tallness, in the current discourse, that is, as the assertion of a linguistic and normative fact. The truly interesting cases, I believe, are however those in which the real existence of such standards is irrelevant, because they may be taken to be set by the very discourse itself.

While (Barker 2002; Sundell 2011; Barker 2013) all contribute valuable observations and insights, that may also be taken to provide some support for the views exposed in this paper, they persist in an approach according to which the expressions under discussion act as assertions, assertions of facts about standards, whether or not these are actual metalinguistic facts in the real world, or facts about some (perhaps post-modernly construed) discourse that we are participating in. Even though Barker, I think correctly, conceives of these facts and standards as socially constructed and negotiable, he does not formally acknowledge that the pieces of discourse at issue serve to actually negotiate and construct them. In the end, upon Barker's analysis, the expressions of faultless disagreement turn out to be a typical kind of assertions, which like all the others, are deemed true or false. This is precisely the point that I have so far been arguing against in this paper.

²⁷ Adopting a more wide and general view of "the discourse situation", this point may become even more telling and significant. Think of the definition or determination of the meter. Arguably, there has never, in human history, been any fixed length of one meter that we have called one meter, and which we have gradually been able to define better. What is one meter is and has always been relatively undetermined, where "relatively undetermined" should be taken to mean less determined than any further determination that has been given in due course. We have, in the course of history, been giving better and better determinations of what was every time thereby more and more precisely defined to be the length of one meter. It is, in the literal sense of the word, construed as an ideal, not as something real.

²⁸ "Glanzberg is right: there is a fact of the matter, and exactly one of [This chili is tasty.] and [This chili is not tasty.] is true." (Barker 2013, p. 253) Mark Richard, quoted above, also thinks that a term the meaning of which is being negotiated, can be used to make a claim can be used in an assertion to make a claim. (Richard 2004, p. 250)

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Metalinguistic approaches by like those advocated in (Plunkett & Sundell 2013; Plunkett 2015) sketch a broader and more sophisticated picture of the phenomena under consideration than those of Barker and Sundell. They consider what they call *metalinguistic negotiations* or *disputes* that concern “the appropriate usage” of an expression, or “the proper deployment of linguistic representations”. (Plunkett & Sundell 2013, p. 3) Their focus is on disagreements or disputes “wherein the speakers’ metalinguistic use of a term (...) [*involves*] negotiating its appropriate use.” It may be illuminating to quote them here somewhat elaborately.

We think that metalinguistic disputes of this latter type are common. Indeed we think such usages extend well beyond the kitchen, to disagreements about what should count as ‘tall’ during our basketball draft, or ‘cold’ in our shared office, or ‘rich’ for our tax base. In any such case, speakers each assert true propositions, but they express those true propositions by virtue of the fact that they set the relevant contextual parameters in different ways. (...) [I]n addition to asserting those propositions — in fact via their assertion of those propositions — they also pragmatically advocate for the parameter settings by virtue of which those propositions are asserted. (...) The view we are proposing is that Oscar accepts the content that we should use ‘spicy’ in such a way that it applies to the chili and Callie accepts the content that we should not use ‘spicy’ in such a way that it applies to the chili. (Plunkett & Sundell 2013, p. 15)

I hope it will be clear by now how much the view advocated in this paper does and does not align with the quoted characterization. On the one hand I fully agree that this kind of understanding of this kind of discourse is very common, and actually, I think, even more general, in that it is not even restricted to evaluative or gradable predicates. (I want to come back to this point shortly.) I also fully agree that the relevant types of discourse are not primarily employed to describe or characterize parameters of evaluation, but actually serve to set or define them. This, however, directly brings me to my point of disagreement, a principled one. That these parameters are set through the assertion of propositions that actually can only be defined relative to those parameters, is something that I disagree with, and that I actually judge quite ununderstandable. Plunkett and Sundell quite rightly point at the perhaps indirectly communicated message that we *we should use a specific term a certain way*, but that can hardly be conceived of as the content of the mentioned

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assertion. The explanation, in the way sketched here, is therefore essentially incomplete or circular.

My main worry with the view of David Plunkett and Timothy Sundell is that its characteristic label suggests that the discussed uses seem to have linguistic impact only. There is however, a subtle, difference in calling something tasty, and saying that the predicate “tasty” applies to it. More clearly perhaps, there is a distinction between calling someone an expert, and saying that the predicate “expert” applies to them. Surely the first of these locutions may induce a change as expressed like that expressed by the second, but the reverse does, I believe, not hold.

At this point I believe I agree with Mark Richard again that the indicated type of use is “substantive,” as he calls it.

Such negotiation is not (merely) metalinguistic: Should Naomi choose to argue with Didi, she does not (merely) argue with her about whether ‘rich’ applies to Mary; she argues with her about whether Mary is rich. (Richard 2004, p. 227) Accommodation and negotiation are (...) substantive; in particular, when Naomi refuses to accommodate Didi’s claim that Mary is rich, they differ as to whether the claim, that Mary is rich, is true. (Richard 2004, p. 228)

It seems to me that, intuitively, the types of discourse do not consist of PROPOSITIONS or *propositions* concerning just our use of language. They normally, and directly, have direct cognitive and social implications.

Independent of the particular *propositions* we make, we normally take a different attitude towards things that count as *tasty*, and we may treat and evaluate people’s opinions differently once they are called *experts*. There may always be reasons for thinking that these objects and people are wrongly characterized that way, but in many cases these reasons may easily elude us, and *being called* one way often counts just as hard as *really being* that way. If something is called water, we may drink it, even if it comes from Twin Earth. It probably needs no comments that there are vast social and behavioral implications of being classified into certain social kinds, even if by the mere classification of oneself as belonging to one. All such classifications of an individual, perhaps by sheer *propositions*, may yield the establishment of a fact. It may be called just a social fact, but these are often more significant to us than many natural facts, so-called. Notice, finally, that whenever we stage *propositions* of the relevant kind, whether it involves the categorization

and subsumption of individual items under a predicate, or perhaps a whole refinement or even redefinition of the predicate, it never necessarily needs to involve a *revision* of a concept or of our language. It can be considered an improvement or adjustment within the language that is entirely appropriate to it.²⁹ What all this suggests, I think, is that any *proposition* made by the locution *This_S is_S P* is not an attempt to just change the use of a predicate, “*P*”, so that it from now on includes this object; and of course it also is not an attempt to change the object from not being *X* to being *X*; rather, the *proposition* serves to make it count as an *X*, while it didn’t do so before.

The last point relates to a final point on which I feel that Plunkett and Sundell’s analysis remains defective: it fails to properly identify the perhaps performative nature of what I call *propositions*. As indicated, upon the view endorsed here, these *propositions* serve, not to report, but to establish facts. The indicative sentences are not understood as assertions, but they are understood to have *constitutive* use. Thus, a perhaps faultlessly disagreeable utterance of the form “*This_S is_S P*” might be circumscribed, not really analyzed, roughly as: “Hereby, by means of this utterance, the object demonstrated is proposed to be *P*.” The circumscription, and the understanding of the utterance likewise, characterizes it as proposing to establish, or declare, a fact, one that is established through the very utterance. It is, thus, properly called a *constitutive* use or understanding of the utterance. I don’t see anything like this emerge from the metalinguistic approach.

As already indicated above, and as acknowledged by Chris Barker, what he calls metalinguistic updates are “no means pathological or exceptional” (Barker 2002, p. 2) and as Peter Ludlow argues, after a discussion of an impressive list of examples, word meanings are underdetermined and subject to modulation and concludes “that this kind of undetermination holds for possibly every predicate that we use.” (Ludlow 2014, p. 101) Ludlow acknowledges that also mathematical terms may be subject to modulation and change, too. (Cf., also, p. 6–7, 82–83.)

The above outline of an analysis of faultless disagreement can thus be seen to fit all kinds of discourse where we find some possibly disagreeable, or even improvable, constituent, and this relates to possibly every type of predicative expressions. As we have stated earlier, instead of “This piece of music is funky,” the example

²⁹See, e.g., Haslanger 2005 for certain kinds of conceptual engineering with regard to natural kinds terms as well as social kinds.

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above might as well have begun with: “This reviewer is an expert,” “The country is a democracy,” “That type of behavior is rational,” or “This inference is valid.” It need not even be the case that an actual or explicit disagreement is involved. Declarative sentences can be understood to teach us the meanings of its constituent terms. (Arguably, this is roughly how actual language learning starts.) One may say that *This piece of furniture is Rococo*, not with the intention of informing the other of this piece of furniture, but with the intention of teaching what Rococo is taken to be. A *proposition* style understanding of locutions must also be in place when the proper use of terms changes over time. Much of our actual discourse, in daily life, in science, and in philosophy, involves deviations from the so-called established use of terms. We may, thus, every here and there, come across implicit or explicit *propositions* to contextually appropriated uses of terms.³⁰

A typical and telling example is the proper use of the, seemingly solid, common noun planet, and more in particular the various classifications that have been given of the planet Pluto over time. At the time that this paper was presented first it really seemed to be quite inappropriate to me to question the by then official IAU definition of a planet. It would be mere foolishness not to agree with the 2006 IAU *proposition*, so that by agreeing with it I committed to the truth of the PROPOSITION that Pluto is not a planet. Now it is not that PROPOSITION that has since been challenged, but the original *proposition* that grounded it. An important player in the field came up with the following, conflicting, *proposition*:

Just so you know, in my view, Pluto is a planet. You can write that the NASA administrator declared Pluto planet once again. I'm sticking by that, it's the way I learned it and I'm committed to it. (Jim Bridenstine, 23/08/2019, Unilad)

Bridenstine clearly stages an unambiguous *proposition*. If we agree with him, Pluto is a planet. But notice that Bridenstine does not state the PROPOSITION that Pluto is a planet while aligning with the use of “planet” as originally proposed by the IAU in 2006. That would, of course, have been an obviously false PROPOSITION. If he had stated any PROPOSITION at all, it would have to have been one according to which Pluto does actually qualify as a planet, where the term “planet” by the very declaration is supposed to apply to Pluto. It would have to have been an

³⁰It seems that it has to remain an idle wish that the ultimately proper use of any terms can ever be settled for once and for all.

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analytic PROPOSITION, again. Of course, it was not Bridenstine's aim to state and communicate an (analytically true) PROPOSITION. His communicative, or coordinative, goal was that of staging a *proposition*. Consequently, and as one can see from the discussion that followed, nobody has been inclined to subsequently engage in some astronomical inquiry to find out whether or not one of the mentioned PROPOSITIONS WAS TRUE, OR FALSE, after all. Instead, colleagues have subsequently deliberated whether or not it was wise to *agree* with Bridenstine's *proposition*. See, e.g., (Starr 2019) for an early reaction of this kind.

The present investigations may also throw a fresh light on the directive or coordinative use of declarative discourse. Following up on an example mentioned earlier, consider a case with two generals issuing two conflicting directives.

General A: Tomorrow we launch an attack.

General B: No we don't. (I am in charge.)

General A's conception of the near future is that we attack tomorrow. General B's conception conflicts with that. Each one of them thinks she is in charge and able to define or command the future situation. There are two *propositions* on the table, and we, or the whole army, cannot, on pain of inconsistency, agree with both. There seems to be a difference with the cases discussed earlier in that, intuitively, this time there may seem to be a future independent of any assessor. However, which future this is arguably depends on, or correlates with, which decision is taken, which *proposition* wins, which of the two *propositions* we, or the whole army, settle and agree upon. General A's *proposition* is that the future is the future as she conceives, or commands, which indeed is the future if we and the whole army agree and go along with her. The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for general B's *proposition*.³¹

Notice that it would be quite inappropriate, in the envisaged situation, for some general C to try and sooth the matter as follows:

General C: We will see. (Who is right. / Who spoke truly.)

³¹Given that the future may always be surprising, it is too rash perhaps to conclude that the PROPOSITION expressed by "Tomorrow we launch an attack" is true once the *proposition* is agreed upon. However, for our daily day concerns and preparations it is the best assumption we can make.

In the envisaged situation it is actually vital to the army that generals *A* and *B* are understood to stage *propositions*, not to state PROPOSITIONS, and that we should all be concerned with which is the decision to be taken now. The primary concern is *deciding* what will happen tomorrow. What ACTUALLY AND EVENTUALLY IS going to happen tomorrow is something that we will only be able to find out tomorrow, and this is, effectively, immaterial now. We should not await the effect of making no decision, but we have to decide. General *C*'s response could thus be disqualified as an arm-chair response, representative of a somewhat irrealist type of philosophy.

4 Theory of Meaning

What are the implications of the preceding observations, if any, for our conception or theory of meaning? A substantial amount of work in standard formal semantics has aimed to provide for a (compositional) characterization of propositional content and much work in cognitive grammar and conceptual semantics has, likewise, concentrated on the descriptive uses of language, and on, e.g., our representational systems of concepts and conceptual activations. It is fair to say that it has indeed proven a sound and revealing methodology to focus on the truth-conditional, or perhaps representational, aspects of meaning.

Nothing we have said here counts against that. The findings of this paper do by no means deny any ground to a *Truth Conditional* or a *Representationalist* semantics. On the contrary, it can be taken to accord them a solid ground on which they can stand. We have only added two qualifications, neither of them by any means original. It is taken for granted that the depictive use of language is only one among others, and that the use of language both requires as well as establishes coordination and agreement. These insights can be found and also seen motivated in (Wittgenstein 1953; Lewis 1969), to mention only two among many sources.

However, what are the prospects if our ideal is a general, formal, theory of meaning, one that not only covers PROPOSITIONS that can be stated, but also the *propositions* that can be staged? I have no constructive answer to that question, now, and I am afraid I have to conclude that such is not so easily accomplished. Two approaches to meaning might be thought to be able, in principle, to cover the additional types of phenomena. Systems of dynamics semantics endorse a concept of meaning that also covers the potential to change actual contexts or situations,

like *propositions* can be taken to do.³² There is more specifically Elisabeth Coppock's recent Outlook Semantics that more particularly aims to model the possibility of deciding matters of taste and disagreement. I will briefly discuss the extent to which these two types of system can be seen to provide for a candidate framework suited to account for the phenomena. Arguably they are not yet in the proper shape to definitively do so.

Dynamic Semantics The work in formal and conceptual semantics has not remained unaffected by more 'pragmatic' insights like those addressed in this paper. Systems of dynamic semantics essentially combine two ideas. (See for instance Kamp 1984 and a huge offspring, representational as well as model-theoretic, such as, e.g., Muskens 1996.) The users of natural language interpret sentences as expressing PROPOSITIONS relative to so-called 'information states', which can, somewhat crudely speaking, be taken to model their cognitive means to individuate objects, properties, and possibly events; and if such relativized PROPOSITIONS are actually *asserted* then they are incorporated in these information states, contributing to what has become standardly known as a 'common ground,' somewhat in the spirit of (Stalnaker 1978). The context of interpretation affects the interpretation of utterances, but these interpretation themselves in turn also affect the context.

Speech acts other than assertions have recently been analysed and incorporated in a dynamic framework, still according to the assertoric, i.e., descriptive paradigm. Various kinds of performative *propositions*, like promises and imperatives, have been conceived of as describing prospects on the future, which were not, or not yet, prospects before those *propositions* were staged. Very briefly, they have been assumed to STATE the recent obtaining of the preconditions of these acts, and the forthcoming obtaining of their post-conditions, and thereby they can actually be taken to MODEL the current realization of the acts themselves. (Condoravdi & Lauer 2011) Through some method of indexical interpretation the performative acts can next be identified with the self-referential assertion of their being performed. (Eckardt 2012; Močnik 2015; Dekker 2016)

While these are promising and insightful extensions of the dynamic paradigm, and also head in the right direction, I believe they fail to properly account for the

³²Chris Barker has as a matter of fact taken these types of utterances to actually motivate a dynamic semantic analysis.

distinction between PROPOSITIONS and *propositions* argued for in this paper. So far as I can see, a framework of the kind sketched would not distinguish information states that result from accepting a PROPOSITION, from those that result from agreeing with a corresponding *proposition*. They will both simply entail the truth of the proposition by means of which either one of them is stated or staged. What is asserted (“We attack tomorrow.”) and accepted has equal status as what is proposed (“We attack tomorrow.”) and agreed with.

However, the kind of agreement that is supposed to be accomplished by means of either one of these acts should, intuitively, be kept distinct. The kind of truth established by the stating of a PROPOSITION is (relatively) objective, while the kind of truth enabled by the staging of a *proposition* is (relatively) negotiable. Even if the general aim of a discursive exchange is that of finding out the truth about certain things, one still should keep the premises about the uses of terms and the commitments which the interlocutors have agreed upon distinct from the findings that have been stated in these terms. The findings are supposed to be objective, even if stated in terms intersubjectively agreed upon. And outside of the realm of pure inquiry, of course, finding out whether the world we live in is as it is PROPOSED to be, is something quite distinct from deciding, i.e., making it the case, that we live in a world that be as it is *proposed* to be. The ‘updated’ information states fail to bear witness of that distinction.

Outlook Semantics Elisabeth Coppock’s “Outlook Semantics” appears to meet the last objection. Coppock presents a compositional semantics formally elaborating Kölbel’s philosophical conception of the perspectives that subjective truth can be said to be relative to. (Kölbel 2004; Coppock 2018) Coppock indeed distinguishes between ‘objective’ and ‘evaluative’ (or ‘opinionated’) discourse and this distinction roughly resembles our distinction between PROPOSITIONS and *propositions*. Coppock’s conception of *outlooks* in particular can be taken to correspond, roughly, to our *propositions*. “Outlooks are refinements of worlds that settle not only matters of fact but also matters of opinion.” (Coppock 2018, p. 125) *Outlooks* are views of, or options taken on, the world, perspectives on how one and the same actual world could or should be looked at. Coppock’s proposal appears to satisfactorily handle faultless disagreements and an impressive amount of typological data in addition. The approach, however, suffers from what I believe to be

an unwarranted simplification.

In order for a compositional semantics for outlooks and worlds to get to work a strict distinction is made between matters of facts and matters of opinion, ontologically, as well as linguistically. Like Kölbel, Coppock assumes that there is a rigid distinction between, in our terms, PROPOSITIONAL (“objective”) and *propositional* (“subjective”) predicates and, hence between PROPOSITIONAL and *propositional* discourse. Even though it is not uncommon practice to entertain such an assumption, it has already been modestly questioned in (Lasersohn 2005, §7.2), and given the considerations offered earlier in this paper, I believe the assumption must eventually be deemed untenable.

Many uses of so-called ‘discretionary’ or ‘taste’ predicates are clearly PROPOSITIONAL. “Try this cake. It is very tasty.” “Yes, indeed, it is.” “The painting is truly beautiful.” The mere fact that people can so insistently pursue their own right in matters of ‘faultless’ disagreement may serve to indicate that they indeed construe their *propositions* as PROPOSITIONS themselves. That is to say, in the terminology of Kölbel and Coppock, they do not conceive of their use of the ‘taste’ predicates as discretionary, but quite the opposite. Likewise, what are supposed to be *propositions* can always be motivated, or enforced, by construing them as if they were PROPOSITIONS. People say: “You do as I say. That’s the law.” People do also say: “You could not be more wrong. This music really is funky.” So-called predicates of ‘taste’ typically call for an apparently objective use. This is why discussions about evaluative predicates are often felt to be so frustrating.

In converse, I have not in this paper refrained from indicating *propositional* uses of so-called objective or non-evaluative predicates. While PROPOSITIONS and PREDICATIONS must be determinate—that is, in a given context—, there seems to be no reason, no ground, nor need, for granting them independent objective existence. Any predicate that candidates for qualifying as objective (non-‘discretionary’) can on occasion be doubted and subjected to further specification and amendment. There certainly are valid psychological, social, and economical, reasons to deny this very point, but they hardly serve to make it false. Even ‘hardcore’ logical terms like “implication” and “contradiction” can be subject to discussion, debate, taste and opinion, too, and such is notably true in circles of logicians. The same goes for hard-core logical validities and for PROPOSITIONS like the law of non-contradiction. When questioned on the right occasion, everybody can of course be made to doubt anything, including the appropriate interpretation of whatever

term, so what point could there be in denying this? As we have seen the concept of a planet can be negotiated.

In conclusion, it seems to me to be improper to speak of so-called ‘discretionary’ and ‘objective’ predicates per se. We can at best distinguish between so-called ‘discretionary’ and ‘objective’ uses of them. Such a distinction, however, is orthogonal to the systematic distinction that has been implemented in Coppock’s outlook semantics, and the implementation should, I believe, be reconsidered.

Let me finally add that the above contemplations may tend to some conclusions that I am not unconditionally happy with. I think we all know, or assume we know, on the relevant occasions, pretty well what cats are, what valid reasoning is, what is tasty, and who are the experts, and we also know very well how to deal with any doubts and disagreements that can be raised, and that are raised, upon these occasions or on other ones. Doesn’t the relativist type of outlook developed here then constitute a threat to such an objective and objectivist enterprise? It does, however not in any damaging way, but in a wholesome way. I believe that one cannot ignore that there is always the possibility of doubt about anything, and that it will not do to silence the possibility by simply denying it. Likewise, it will not do to settle on the idea of a secure and select set of predicates, with objective and unchangeable meaning. Perhaps we can indeed *assume* that there are such objective terms and predicates, but we will, I take it, not succeed in settling for once and for all which ones they are, and what their meanings are. Of course we can always make linguistic *stipulations*, but the real question is, not whether they are true, but whether we agree with them and will continue to do so.

5 Conclusion

In sum, and in our newly developed terminology, our conclusions can be formulated as follows. The TRUTH of a proposition can be assessment relative, but only insofar as is the PROPOSITION that it states. And a PROPOSITION can be assessment relative in that it presupposes assessed agreement about the use of a proposition’s terms. A public, Fregean realm of PROPOSITIONS as truth bearers can be secured, but it can be maintained only relative to a presupposed *agreement* on the use of the terms involved. If the assessment relativity of the terms plays up, because, e.g., there is doubt or dispute about a standard interpretation or applica-

tion of its terms, a proposition at best stages a *proposition*. Such a *proposition* cannot, however, be TRUE or FALSE, but can at best be *agreed* or *disagreed* with.

Classical, truth-conditional and representational systems of semantics can be properly motivated and pursued so long as we keep in mind they restrict themselves, for good methodological reasons, to PROPOSITIONAL discourse. As seems to be generally agreed, in order for their models to be cognitively realistic they will eventually have to make room for conceptual parametrisation. However, while a conceptual or cognitive or neuro-semantics may thus serve as a complementary paradigm, the whole may still be insufficient to characterize the full package of meaningful uses of natural language. They fail the public domain, only where it is that *propositions* are staged and *agreement* can be reached.

Our verbal activities appears to be meaningful only in a domain of social practices, that can be changed through the very same means of verbal activity. The truly dynamic types of discourse are those in which language is employed for the purpose of establishing facts in the world as well as in the use of language itself. Characterizing this is a formidable enterprise.

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