To the Graduate School:

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of Erik Hoversten presented on April 25, 2008.

Marc Moffett, Chairperson

Ruben Gamboa, Graduate Faculty Representative

Franz-Peter Griesmaier

Darko Sarenac

APPROVED:

Edward Sherline, Department Head, Department of Philosophy

Don Roth, Dean, The Graduate School

Semantic relativism is the thesis that propositions possess a truth value only relative to some non-standard parameter of evaluation such as times, standards, or judges. In this essay, I examine the evidence for judge-relativism provided by discourses involving disagreement over matters of taste. Intuitively, these discourses involve faultless disagreement – despite having a point of genuine conflict between them, both parties involved make correct assertions. An analysis of the semantic significance of these discourses reveals a number of criteria that an adequate proposal for the semantics of predicates of personal taste must meet. While relativism offers one adequate proposal, I argue that the semantic contextualist can also adequately account for the intuitions elicited by these discourses. According to the contextualist, the disputants semantically express true propositions that do not conflict. Their disagreement, however, stems from conflicting commitments that arise from certain pragmatic effects of their utterances in the conversation.
DISAGREEMENT IN CONTEXT

by
Erik Hoversten

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1. The Relativist Challenge

1.1. Faultless disagreement

Individuals engage in genuine disagreement when the holding of a position maintained by one of them precludes the simultaneous acceptance of a position maintained by the other. When all goes well, genuine disagreements are resolved when one of the individuals realizes that their stance rests somehow on a mistake and gives it up. Perhaps one of the disputants overlooked a crucial piece of evidence or misevaluated the facts of the situation, but as a general rule, disagreements are engendered because one of the individuals involved has made an error. In fact, the primary reason that most of us engage in disputes is to get another individual to recognize the error of their ways and accept our position. Despite this general approach to disagreement, some realms of discourse seem pre-theoretically to allow for the possibility of disagreement that is faultless. A conversation involves a faultless disagreement when two or more individuals are engaged in a genuine disagreement and yet no party is guilty of making a mistake in maintaining the position that they do. Regarding issues of value such as culinary taste, aesthetic quality, and morality, some are inclined to suggest that two people could take opposing stances on an issue and yet both be correct. While individuals can engage in genuine disputes over these matters, ultimately, resolving the dispute in favor of one side or the other does no service because truth in these issues is a matter of personal opinion. Eventually, these disputants must “agree to disagree”.
Countenancing genuine faultless disagreement is the hallmark of relativism about truth. If two disputants genuinely disagree, then there must be some issue on which they take opposing positions. In effect, there is some proposition to which these individuals assign different truth values. If we make the plausible suggestion that individuals maintain a position that is in error when they assign the wrong truth value to a proposition, then it would seem that in order for individuals to be engaged in a genuine disagreement in which no mistake has been made, there must be some way for both truth and falsity to attach equally to a single proposition. And relativism just is the thesis that the truth value of a proposition is sensitive to the perspective from which it is evaluated.

In light of the well-known theoretical difficulties that surround relativism about truth, many philosophers are inclined to simply deny the pre-theoretic intuition that faultless disagreement is possible. They maintain instead that purportedly faultless disputes must either involve a mistake on the part of one of the disputants or a mistake in thinking that the individuals genuinely disagree. In order to support their claim against this staunch denial, some relativists have turned to linguistic practice to provide independent evidence that faultless disagreement exists. They claim that capturing specific behavior of certain linguistic expressions requires a semantic theory that countenances relativistic propositions. The strategy is to present short discourses such as the following between Sara and Tom.

Chili
Sara: This chili is tasty.
Tom: No, this chili is not tasty.

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1 The case for relativism based on faultless disagreement is presented variously by Köbel (2003), Lopez de Sa (2007), Lasersohn (2005), MacFarlane (2007), and Wright (2001).
2 Alternatively, one individual accepts a proposition that is incompatible with a proposition accepted by the other.
The claim is that these discourses elicit two linguistic intuitions. The first is that Sara and Tom genuinely disagree. The second is that neither of them speaks falsely. Let’s label these intuitions the genuine disagreement intuition and the mutual correctness intuition, respectively. These dual intuitions elicited by certain discourses constitute a bit of linguistic data that an adequate semantic theory should account for. Instead of relying on pre-theoretic intuition, the relativist maintains that discourses such as Chili, in which both intuitions are elicited simultaneously, provide a source of empirical evidence that relativism about truth is commonly represented in our linguistic practice.³

In this essay, I examine the evidence that purported faultless disagreement provides for the relativist thesis that linguistic practice demands countenancing relativistic propositions. For ease of exposition, I restrict my discussion to one realm of discourse that seems to naturally lend itself to the possibility of faultless disagreement; namely, attributions of culinary value. The dual intuitions of genuine disagreement and mutual correctness elicited by example discourses such as Chili represent the key piece of linguistic evidence to which I will appeal throughout my discussion. In the remainder of this chapter, I lay out the semantic terrain. I distinguish three broad approaches to providing a semantic account of the class of expressions known as the predicates of personal taste (e.g., ‘tasty’ and ‘fun’) and discuss the prima facie successes and failures of each of these approaches in capturing the dual intuitions.

In Ch. 2, I examine the evidence in more detail. As with any data, the significance of the dual intuitions is open to interpretation. I consider a number of potential interpretations of the data that allow a non-relativist (henceforth, absolutist)

³ The general methodological approach of appealing to linguistic practice to motivate relativism is discussed critically in Wright (2007).
semantic theory to capture it. In light of this discussion, I present a number of criteria that an adequate interpretation of the linguistic data must respect. While there is a clear interpretation of the data on which it evinces relativism, the possibility of an interpretation that adequately represents the data and is consistent with absolutism cannot be ruled out on its face. In Ch. 3, I argue that, as a general phenomenon, disagreement is not just a matter of individuals uttering sentences that semantically express conflicting propositions. In addition, genuine disagreement can arise from conflicting pragmatic commitments that individuals accrue based on their utterances in conversation. In Ch. 4, I apply this notion of pragmatic conflict to the phenomenon of faultless disagreement and argue that by looking to the broader conversational context within which disputes over matters of taste take place, the linguistic data can be captured without being forced to countenance relativistic propositions. Finally, in Ch. 5, I develop in more detail a particular absolutist semantic account of the predicates of personal taste and address some challenges that this account faces.

1.2. Semantic approaches

Semantic theory is concerned, in part, with stating the conditions under which sentences of a language are true, and this involves giving at least some account of the nature of propositions. This is because it is the truth of the proposition that a particular sentence expresses in a context that determines the truth value of that sentence. In discharging the duty of determining the truth value of natural language sentences, semantic theory must cope with the fact that context can affect their truth in various ways. First, some sentences of natural language are ambiguous. The single English
sentence, “Every man loves some woman” can potentially express two different propositions, and we rely on context to determine which of these is relevant to a particular occurrence of the sentence. Additionally, some sub-sentential expressions of natural language, when used in accordance with their conventional meaning, contribute different content to sentences on different instances of their use. Expressions of this sort are context sensitive. The prime examples of context sensitive expressions are the indexicals (‘I’, ‘here’, ‘now’, etc.). When two different individuals utter the sentence “I am hungry,” the sentence expresses a different proposition in virtue of the fact that ‘I’ refers to a different individual in each of its occurrences. Ambiguity and context sensitivity are two examples of how context can affect the conditions under which a sentence is true by playing a role in determining the proposition that a particular occurrence, or utterance, of that sentence expresses.

In addition to determining the proposition expressed by a particular utterance of a sentence, context may affect the truth of a sentence by influencing the truth value of the proposition it expresses. Propositions possess the truth value that they do only relative to a circumstance of evaluation. Traditionally, the circumstance of evaluation is represented as a possible world. While it is true that grass is green, it very well could have been blue. We represent this, and other similar facts, by saying that relative to some possible worlds, the proposition that grass is green is false. Contextual factors such as the world of interest can thus affect the truth of a sentence by factoring into the circumstance against which the proposition expressed by that sentence is evaluated for truth. Relativity to worlds, however, is not particularly relevant to contextual variation of sentences in use. This is because while it is true that when the proposition that grass is green is evaluated at
some possible worlds it is false and at others it is true, the sentence “Grass is green” only has interesting occurrences in our world. While the world relativity of propositions is important for representing certain features of languages such as modality, it would appear to be of no consequence regarding contextual variation of the truth of utterances.

Absolutism about propositions is the thesis that propositional truth is sensitive only to the specification of a world of evaluation. However, one may suggest that there are contextual features in addition to the world of evaluation that are significant to the truth value of propositions and which are more influential to the truth of sentences in actual use. One plausible candidate for such a contextual feature is time. We may suggest that the sentence “There are no colonies on Mars” expresses the same proposition now as it would if uttered in the distant future; yet, while relative to the present time that proposition is true, it may be that relative to some future time, it is false. Thus, on two different (actual) occurrences of this sentence, it could have different truth values. On this view, in order to determine the truth of the proposition expressed by a sentence, one must specify a time of evaluation in addition to a world.

At least potentially, context can affect the truth of a sentence of natural language in two ways. It may serve to determine exactly which proposition a particular utterance of a sentence expresses, and it may serve to determine the truth value of the proposition expressed by that utterance. Let us call these two roles of context the content determination role and the circumstance of evaluation role respectively. In light of these two roles of context, there are three general semantic approaches that one can take in attempting to provide a semantic account of a class of expressions. First, the expressions

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4 MacFarlane (2003) argues for this approach to the significance of time in determining the truth of propositions. King (2003) argues that time does not play such a role.
may be viewed as contributing different content to sentences in which they occur depending on context. As a result, sentences containing such expressions may express different propositions relative to different contexts. According to this approach, known as contextualism, context is effectual in its content determination role for this class of expressions.

Second, the expressions may be viewed as making reference to some feature of context that, when varied, affects the truth value of the proposition expressed by sentences containing these expressions. Even though these sentences express the same proposition in all contexts, that proposition, and hence the sentence that expresses it, may have a different truth value relative to the specification of different values for some parameter of the circumstance of evaluation. This approach suggests that context sensitivity surrounding this class of expressions stems from the circumstance of evaluation role of context. Since this approach posits relativity of propositional truth to the specification of a value for a particular contextual parameter, we can label it relativism. While relativism may be motivated by the linguistic behavior of certain sub-sentential expressions, it should be emphasized that it is a thesis about the nature of propositions generally. The relativist claims that there are certain contextual features against which all propositions are evaluated to determine their truth. The truth of certain propositions may be more or less sensitive to changes in the value of certain parameters, but all propositions have a truth value only relative to a specific assignment of values for each parameter of the circumstance of evaluation.

On the third semantic approach, context is viewed as completely inert in determining the truth value of sentences containing a member of this class of expressions.
On this approach, expressions contribute the same content in all contexts and the truth value of the proposition expressed is not affected by any features of context other than the distribution of facts in the world. I refer to this semantic approach as invariantism.5

1.3. Linguistic evidence

The goal of the semanticist is to provide a systematic account of our shared linguistic knowledge. This goal of systematicity provides some motivation for prima facie preferring invariantist semantic accounts. If empirical adequacy (in the sense of adequately capturing the way in which certain terms behave in linguistic practice) is held constant, contextualism and relativism are distinctly less elegant semantic approaches. They require the semanticist to posit additional semantic structure, to treat some expression types differently from others, and to suggest that the same linguistic structure may exhibit quite different behavior in its different occurrences.6 Regarding semantic theorizing, Paul Grice proposed a methodological principle that he labeled Modified Occam’s Razor (now commonly referred to as Grice’s Razor). This principle essentially places a simplicity constraint on semantic theory. It states that in response to linguistic data that indicates variability in the use of certain expressions, positing semantic complexity (in the form, for example, of ambiguity or indexicality) should be avoided if an adequate pragmatic explanation of the data can be given. In addition to the quite generic preference for theoretical simplicity in scientific investigation, avoiding

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5 Because I don’t think that addressing it substantially impacts the discussion, I do not consider the fourth semantic alternative – that a class of expressions may involve contextual influence in both its content determining and circumstance of evaluation roles.

6 The notion of semantic elegance deserves a more rigorous treatment than I can give it here. For the most part, when I reference semantic elegance/complexity in this essay, I appeal to intuitive considerations regarding the relative frugality of various linguistic posits.
theoretical complication specifically in the field of semantic theory has independent motivation. Humans have an innate ability to learn and understand language. And given our limited cognitive resources, it would seem that the rules that underwrite our linguistic performance should be relatively simple. If a semantic theory is forced to posit a great deal of complexity in order to capture the linguistic data, it begins to lose hold on its claim to being an adequate account of our shared linguistic knowledge.  

However, the semanticist must also respect the evidence that linguistic practice provides, and some of this evidence may demand systematic complications to semantic theory. We may simply be unable to explain certain linguistic phenomena without appeal to some contextualist or relativist principles. This is obviously the case for some contextualist theses. The way in which indexical expressions such as ‘I’, ‘here’, and ‘now’ function cannot be adequately captured on an invariantist framework, whereas the contextualist approach provides a quite satisfactory explanation of their behavior. More controversially, yet still well motivated, gradable adjectives such as ‘tall’ and ‘strong’ and quantifier phrases like ‘all’ and ‘every’ exhibit behavior that is best explained by appeal to contextual variation in the content they contribute to sentences.

7 Modified Occam’s Razor is introduced in Grice (1989, Ch. 2: Further Notes on Logic and Conversation). Grice develops his notion of conversational implicature by which one can give pragmatic explanations of various linguistic data in Grice (1989, Ch. 1: Logic and Conversation). In attempting to keep one’s semantics relatively clean, the burden of explaining linguistic practice is shifted into the realm of pragmatics. While heeding Grice’s Razor may require that one posit complications within pragmatic theory, there is reason to suggest that, ceteris paribus, systematic appeal to conversational practice to explain linguistic phenomena better respects the constraint of human cognitive limitations. Bontly (2005) provides a detailed discussion of the value and limitations of Grice’s Razor in terms of its relevance in accounting for language acquisition and development.

8 David Kaplan’s (1989) logic of demonstratives provides the quintessential treatment of indexicals on a contextualist framework.

9 The context sensitivity of gradable adjectives is assumed by many philosophers; however, see Cappelen and Lepore (2005) for a contrary view. A contextualist semantic representation of quantifier domain restriction is argued for in Stanley and Szabo (2000).
The proposed evidence for relativism is much more controversial. One suggestion is that there exists context sensitive behavior that can only be explained by contextual variation due to the circumstance of evaluation role of context, as opposed to its content determining role. The potential inability of the content determining role of context to explain certain behavior stems from the very different ways that context comes into play in its two roles. In its content determining role, the context is the situation (broadly construed) within which the particular utterance of a sentence occurs.\footnote{This isn’t perfectly accurate. As Kaplan (1989, p. 522) points out, content determination by context is a feature of sentences in context. Utterances are the objects of speech act theory. Since I don’t find it to be crucial to my discussion, I blur this distinction. For my purposes, utterances represent sentences in context.} Utterances are events, and consequently, there is a specific location at which they occur. The contextualist maintains that certain features of this particular location determine the content expressed by, and thus the truth of, the sentence uttered.\footnote{The context in which a sentence occurs is a very complex entity, and it is not at all clear that its nature can be easily specified by the location of utterance. As Egan (forthcoming a) and Parsons (manuscript) argue, restricting the context to features surrounding the utterance alone may render it incapable of fully determining the content of a sentence. For example, in order to determine the proposition expressed by the sentence, “Uncle Sam wants you,” as inscribed on a roadside billboard, it seems that we need more information than is available at the time and location of inscription. Part of the content will be determined by the context in which the sentence is assessed – that is, the context of the hearing (or reading) of the sentence. Additionally, it is not clear that the content determining powers of context can be limited to features of the utterance of a single sentence. Glanzberg (2002) has argued that the truth conditions of certain sentences can only be determined in light of the entirety of the discourse in which the sentence occurs. These ideas suggest that specifying the content determining power of context is a much more complex matter than just listing certain factors surrounding the utterance of a sentence. While this complicates the specification of the context, the basic claim that content is determined by the situation within which the utterance occurs remains intact.} In its content determining role, the relevant contextual features are fixed by the utterance event. In its circumstance of evaluation role, however, context acts on propositions, and propositions are not localized entities. Because of this, the relativist need not maintain that a particular utterance has a determinate truth value. Instead, it is consistent with the relativist position that the same utterance be assigned different truth values based on
different assignments of values to the parameters of the circumstance of evaluation. In its circumstance of evaluation role, the values of contextual parameters can be shifted independently of the context in which the sentence occurs and independently of each other. Potentially, when different individuals assess an utterance, they may assign different values to a particular contextual parameter and thus attribute a different truth value to the proposition expressed. It may be that certain values are made especially relevant by the nature of the utterance event (or the nature of the context of assessment), but it may also be quite open how one who is evaluating a sentence ought to assign values to the relevant contextual parameters. This distinction is important because it may appear that certain instances of contextual variation in the truth of sentences result not from relevant differences in utterance events but from the assignment of different values for contextual parameters at the point of evaluation.

Since relativism allows for independent specification of contextual values in determining the truth of sentences, one possible source of evidence in favor of relativism regarding certain expression types is the presence of certain linguistic constructions that apparently involve independent shifts of particular contextual features. David Lewis (1981, p. 84) lists a number of examples of this type of contextual variation. It would appear that “The dog was barking” is true just in case sometime in the past “The dog is barking” was true, that “Somewhere, the sun is shining” is true just in case “The sun is shining” is true at some location, and that “It is possible that grass should be blue” is true just in case “Grass is blue” is true at some possible world. Moreover, the values for the contextual features of time, location, and world that are pertinent for determining the truth of these sentences are not determinately set by the utterance event. Thus, we may
suggest that in order to capture the function of these linguistic constructions, times, locations, and worlds are all features that require a slot in the circumstance of evaluation. Lewis suggests that the list of parameters needed to account for these sorts of linguistic constructions may be quite short, and he points to a couple possibilities that English just does not countenance. We do not, for instance, have a construction that allows us to shift the speaker of the context. If we did, perhaps “As for you, I am tired” would be true just in case “I am tired” is true for you as the agent of the context. The agent of the context is one feature that does not warrant specification in the circumstance of evaluation.

There are certain features of context that do not shift in the way Lewis suggests, but it does not appear that there is any principled restriction on membership in the circumstance of evaluation available. Instead, further examination of the behavior of linguistic constructions may potentially reveal more and more relevant parameters. In fact, it seems that we ought to expand our consideration from explicit linguistic constructions that appear to involve independent variation of contextual features to more general linguistic phenomena that appear to do so. The motivation for relativism is that it is needed to capture certain ways in which our language works, and there are certain ways in which contextual variation takes place that do not involve explicit linguistic constructions. Mark Richard (2004) suggests that the phenomena of accommodation and negotiation in linguistic practice involve individuals shifting particular features of their context in order to align it with, or accommodate, the context of their conversational partners. In effect, when individuals set out to evaluate the contributions made by their conversational partners, they appear to have the freedom to adjust the values of certain contextual features based on the course of the conversation. One such feature that
Richard explicitly points to is the standard against which we judge whether a person
counts as rich (or tall, etc.). Individuals may start a conversation applying quite different
standards and shift their standards to come into alignment throughout the course of the
conversation. The phenomenon of accommodation might suggest that contextual features
that allow for this sort of independent shifting also demand membership in the
circumstance of evaluation.

The problem with this approach to motivating relativistic treatment of contextual
variation is that it potentially leads to a vast expansion of circumstances of evaluation.\textsuperscript{12} Accommodation and negotiation are prevalent in linguistic practice. The restriction on
quantifier domains, the nature of the possessive relation, and the set of shared
presuppositions are all subject to alteration by accommodation. If a contextual feature’s
being subject to accommodation is taken to indicate membership in the circumstance of
evaluation, then the circumstance of evaluation will have to have a very large
membership. This is potentially disturbing, but the real issue is that it seems to be an
open question as to what parameters exactly should belong based on this evidence. If
apparent instances of independent shiftability of contextual factors are taken as sufficient
evidence for membership in circumstances of evaluation, then these circumstances might
just be open ended. And this is bad news for semantic theory. Language users seem to
do a very good job of evaluating sentences for truth in the thick of conversation.

However, if this involved evaluating the proposition expressed by a sentence against an
open ended number of various contextual features (and potentially against various values
for those features), then it would be a miracle that any conversation continued beyond the

\textsuperscript{12} This problem is spelled out in more detail in Glanzberg (2007).
first assertion. Relativism threatens to be an unstable position. If we appeal to it to account for certain instances of context sensitivity, then we seem to be forced into appealing to it for a vast number of other instances, and the result is a semantic theory that is complicated beyond the point of plausibility. While the presence of linguistic phenomena that apparently involve independent shiftability of contextual features may provide initial support to the relativist approach, it cannot plausibly constitute a sufficient condition for positing a parameter in the circumstance of evaluation.

1.4. Relativism and taste

As a semantic thesis, relativism comes in many flavors. Any posited addition of some contextual feature to the circumstance of evaluation constitutes a relativist thesis regarding the nature of propositions. As a metaphysical thesis, though, relativism is generally put forth as the claim that truth is relative to a perspective. This, too, has varieties; perspectives may be individuated at the level of individual agents, cultural groups, or various other “systems of thought”, but in general, the idea behind relativism is that the class of true things may vary with respect to some viewpoint. This metaphysical thesis can be captured semantically by positing some parameter in the circumstance of evaluation that captures this particular way in which propositions may be sensitive to variation. I will follow common practice in labeling this parameter the judge parameter.13 By representing the truth of propositions as relative to the assignment of a particular judge, we can capture the basic relativist claim that what is true for you may not be true for me.

13 This label for representing the relativist thesis was introduced by Lasersohn (2005).
While relativism is a global thesis about the nature of propositions generally, its significance can be restricted to local claims about the behavior of certain expressions that contribute semantic content to propositions. The suggestion is that while the truth of a proposition is sensitive to the specification of a judge against which it is evaluated, the truth value of some propositions may be quite insensitive to changes in the value of the judge parameter. Some propositions may even have a constant truth value across all judges. This idea is parallel to the way in which the truth of propositions is sensitive to possible worlds. While all propositions are evaluated against a possible world, some propositions (the necessary ones) are evaluated as true on all specifications of a value for the world parameter. So, the relativist can maintain that while propositions expressed by sentences involving mathematical terms may be very insensitive to changes in the judge parameter, propositions expressed by sentences involving other types of terms (e.g., terms such as ‘tasty’) may exhibit a high degree of sensitivity.

The addition of the judge parameter to the circumstance of evaluation meets the shiftability requirement discussed above. At least prima facie, linguistic constructions such as “for me” and “to you” might be viewed as sentential operators that independently shift the contextual judge feature. Plausibly, the effect of attaching “For me” to sentences such as “chili is tasty” is to specify the perspective against which the proposition expressed by those sentences is to be evaluated. Of course, we have seen that the

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14 Hales (1997) presents a case for relativizing propositions to perspectives based on an analogy to world relativity.
15 Although, the picture becomes complicated. As Lewis (1981) recognized, taking these sorts of constructions as sentence operators undermines the project of assigning propositions as the semantic values of sentences. Instead, we seem to need to assign different objects as the semantic values of sentences, and then provide a means by which these values determine a proposition. King (2007; Ch. 6) discusses this worry in detail, and also provides reason for not treating temporal, location, and standards constructions as sentence operators.
presence of these constructions cannot constitute a sufficient condition of relativity. In fact, it seems equally plausible to take a contextualist approach and represent those constructions as making explicit a contextual qualification on the content that expressions such as ‘tasty’ contribute to sentences.

However, to further support the addition of the judge parameter, the relativist can point to the phenomenon of faultless disagreement. If propositions are sensitive to the specification of a value for the judge parameter, then it is quite possible for a single proposition to have different truth values relative to different such specifications, and this could potentially account for the two intuitions that are elicited by discourses such as *Chili*. The relativist challenge is that adequately capturing the context sensitivity of the truth of sentences involving predicates of personal taste requires a semantic theory that countenances a judge parameter in the circumstance of evaluation.

The semantic relativist has the tools to offer the following analysis of the intuitions elicited by discourses such as *Chili*. The genuine disagreement intuition is captured by the fact that Sara and Tom have asserted incompatible propositions. The proposition expressed by Tom’s utterance is just the denial of that expressed by Sara’s, so there is a point of direct contention between them. Additionally, the mutual correctness intuition is explained by the relativist contention that propositions only have truth values relative to the specification of a value for the judge parameter of the circumstance of evaluation. Consequently, one can claim that the correctness of Sara’s assertion derives from the fact that relative to Sara as judge the proposition that *this chili is tasty* is true, and that the correctness of Tom’s assertion derives from the fact that relative to Tom as judge the denial of that proposition is true.
Relativism’s absolutist competitors do not have available the semantic framework to capture both intuitions. Invariantism maintains, like relativism, that Sara and Tom have asserted incompatible propositions. Thus, the genuine disagreement intuition is captured. However, invariantism also maintains that propositional truth is sensitive only to the specification of a value for the world parameter of the circumstance of evaluation. Since the pertinent world is presumably the same for each of the propositions expressed, and since they are incompatible, they cannot both be evaluated as true. Consequently, invariantism falters on the mutual correctness intuition.

Contextualism can clear this stumbling block by maintaining that the content that expressions such as ‘tasty’ contribute to sentences is dependent on context. As a result, if their utterances take place in relevantly different contexts, it is conceivable that the proposition expressed by Tom’s utterance is compatible with that expressed by Sara’s. However, the work that contextualism does to preserve mutual correctness seems to undermine its ability to capture the genuine disagreement intuition. If Tom’s assertion is not taken to be the denial of Sara’s, then it is not clear what point of contention there is between them.

The nature of faultless disagreement is such that if an absolutist semantic theory is to make sense of the linguistic data presented by discourses such as Chili, some alternative characterization of the significance of the evidence must be offered. Toward this end, there are two lines of inquiry into the evidential status of faultless disagreement that deserve investigation. We may ask first whether the linguistic data is genuine. Are there actual discourses in which both of these intuitions are elicited? If the answer is no, then there is no reason to take the relativist challenge seriously. If, however, the answer
to the first question is affirmative (or if it cannot be established that it is negative), we may then ask whether relativism offers the best (or only) viable interpretation of the linguistic data. In the next chapter, I undertake an examination of the phenomenon of faultless disagreement as represented by discourses such as *Chili*. My method is to examine potential absolutist responses to these two lines of inquiry.
2. The Linguistic Significance of Faultless Disagreement

2.1. Introduction

The discussion from the last chapter suggests that accepting the possibility of faultless disagreement entails accepting that propositions are relativistic entities whose truth value is sensitive to a perspective, or judge, against which they are evaluated. In light of this consequence, if an advocate of absolutism is to make sense of the linguistic data provided by discourses such as Chili, he must argue that these discourses do not represent instances of genuine faultless disagreement. The goal of this chapter is to examine potential attempts to do just that. I divide these attempts into two categories based on how they interpret the significance of the dual intuitions of genuine disagreement and mutual correctness.

In Section 2.2, I address attempts to deny that actual disagreements over taste ever elicit both intuitions. This approach suggests that the phenomenon to which the relativist appeals does not actually occur in linguistic practice. Alternatively, one could allow that certain discourses may elicit both intuitions, but deny that this fact provides adequate evidence of genuine faultless disagreement. In Section 2.3, I address attempts to provide an alternative interpretation of the significance of one or the other of the intuitions.

I believe that each of the absolutist proposals I consider fails to provide an adequate account of the linguistic data. Based on these failures, I present five criteria that I take it to be necessary for an adequate interpretation of the linguistic data to meet. While these criteria preclude certain absolutist proposals from consideration, they do not rule out absolutism a priori. In Ch. 4, I will argue for a particular account of the
significance of the mutual correctness and genuine disagreement intuitions that respects these criteria and renders the linguistic data consistent with absolutism.

2.2. Denying the reality of the phenomenon

It is simply antithetical to the notion of absolute truth that two propositions can be contradictory and yet simultaneously true (relative to a single world). One response available to the absolutist to avoid being forced into accepting the relativist challenge is to deny that the phenomenon to which the relativist appeals ever actually occurs. This approach amounts to denying that the two intuitions purportedly involved in discourses such as Chili are ever elicited in the same scenario. This position, advocated by Andrea Iacona (forthcoming) and Isidora Stojanovic (manuscript), maintains that while there are situations in which individuals argue over taste that can be described as genuine disagreements and there are similar situations that can be described as ones in which both individuals speak truly, it is never the case that these descriptions characterize the same discourse. We thus have the following description of the evidence provided by discourses such as Chili.

**Faultless or Disagreement**

All disputes over taste are such that they involve genuine disagreement or they involve faultlessness, but not both.

In support of this claim, the absolutist may offer something like the following story. Predicates such as ‘tasty’ are in some sense ambiguous between a subjective and an objective reading, and as a consequence, disputes over taste are similarly ambiguous. In cases where we have a strong intuition that both parties are correct, the subjective reading is in effect, and the dispute is empty. When we take it that there is genuine disagreement,
the objective reading is in effect, but in this case, one of the parties simply must be wrong. And in any case that prima facie involves both intuitions, closer inspection will reveal that one intuition weighs out.

When the phenomenon of faultless disagreement is understood in this way, it is relatively easy to capture the data via a contextualist semantics. First, we suppose that predicates of personal taste contain, at the level of logical form, an argument position whose potential value ranges over individuals and is set in some way by context. One possibility for how context determines the value of this variable is that the standing meaning of such predicates involves a rule in which the standard of, for example, tastiness is set to the taste standards of the speaker of the context. This allows us to capture the subjective sense of these predicates in that the context determines an individual to fill the implicit argument slot and relevant differences between the contexts of the two utterances (they involve different speakers) can plausibly result in different, compatible propositions being expressed by the apparently contradictory sentences.

Additionally, since this account posits a variable position at logical form, the variable can be bound by a universal quantifier. This fact allows us to capture the objective reading of predicates of personal taste. When the objective sense is in effect, the speakers make a claim to the effect that for all individual standards of taste the subject is (not) tasty. The propositions expressed by utterances such as Sara’s and Tom’s when the objective sense of ‘tasty’ is operative thus are incompatible and the disagreement is genuine.

This gives us the following picture of the semantics of predicates of personal taste. Sentences such as “This chili is tasty” are ambiguous. On the subjective reading,
the logical form of this sentence is “This chili is tasty to S”, where S is the contextually determined value of the implicit argument slot. On one account, the content of this sentence relative to a context in which Sara is the speaker is the proposition that *this chili is tasty to Sara*, and relative to a context in which Tom is the speaker, it is the proposition that *this chili is tasty to Tom*. On the objective reading, the logical form of the sentence is “For all x, this chili is tasty to x.”

If we accept the claim that the intuitions of mutual correctness and genuine disagreement are never both elicited in the same discourse, the above semantic analysis of predicates of personal taste explains the data in a way that is consistent with absolutism. But should we accept this claim? It is *prima facie* supported by the fact that it can be quite difficult to describe situations in which the dual intuitions are clearly elicited. Even with situations that seem initially to be instances of actual faultless disagreement, when more details are supplied, it is easy to find oneself being pushed one direction or another. Due to the revisionary nature of the relativist thesis, perhaps the onus is on the relativist to provide us with unquestionable evidence in the form of actual cases involving clearly faultless disagreement.

It is certainly true that a theory whose motivation is based on specific data ought to be able to document that data. However, the absolutist ought to be careful with the demands she makes. As Kölbel (2003) emphasizes, much of the initial motivation for relativism comes from that fact that faultless disagreement is pre-theoretically taken by many people to be possible in certain domains. This pre-theoretic intuition is only

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16 We may also suggest that context determines a restriction on the universal quantifier such that relative to a context in which the class of humans represents the pertinent domain of quantification, the content of this sentence is (roughly) the proposition that *this chili is tasty for all humans.*
strongly questioned once it runs up against the theoretical roadblock of absolutism about truth. The relativist might suggest that the onus to provide us with uncontroversial cases of genuine faultless disagreement is a requirement that cannot be met. This is not because these cases are too hard to find, but because the analysis of actual cases is not theoretically neutral. The notion of absolute truth is very well entrenched, especially in philosophical circles. It is not a ridiculous claim that theoretical biases regarding the nature of truth might creep into an individual’s analysis of a particular case. Individuals may have theoretical commitments to absolute truth, and as a result, their interpretations of cases may tend to overlook or explain away challenges to it. However, this commitment to absolute truth is precisely what the relativist is challenging.

It seems that the denial of the reality of the phenomenon that the absolutist here proposes is motivated by a theoretical commitment to absolutism. While positing two distinct senses of ‘tasty’ allows us to explain away the relativist challenge, it is not clear that there is independent support for these senses beyond the desire to preserve absolutism. Accepting the absolutist proposal on this basis does not strike me as especially good methodology. This is much the same worry that was brought against the relativist for presenting faultless disagreement as evidence in favor of her view without providing any independent reason to think that faultless disagreement actually exists. Due to the nature of the debate that the linguistic data is intended to resolve, the following criterion on an adequate interpretation of the data is appropriate.

Criterion #1: Theoretical neutrality
An adequate explanation of the data ought not to base its justification solely on theoretical considerations regarding the nature of truth.
I suggest that *ceteris paribus* an absolutist reinterpretation of the linguistic evidence should not depend for its motivation solely on a theoretical bias for absolutism. However, the absolutist proposal presented here does offer a viable semantic account of the predicates of personal taste. If this account was significantly more appealing than the relativist proposal, this fact could lend independent support to *Faultless or Disagreement*. Instead of the interpretation of the data lending support to the contextualist semantic account, the plausibility of the semantic account might support the interpretation of the data. I do not, however, think that this is the case. Relativism seems to fare better than this contextualist proposal on the significant issue of semantic simplicity.

In order to capture the fact that predicates of personal taste show up both in discourses that involve genuine disagreement and those that involve faultlessness, the contextualist of this bent is forced to posit an ambiguity in predicates of personal taste. This sort of approach to explaining linguistic phenomena runs counter to Grice’s Razor. While certain semantic ambiguities are essential in natural language, if there are alternative approaches to explaining the phenomena, Grice’s Razor suggests that appeal to ambiguity ought to be avoided. Arguably, relativism offers just such an alternative.

Now, if the alternative is relativism, the contextualist may suggest that considerations of simplicity do not decide the issue. After all, relativism also posits significant additional semantic infrastructure. However, on this issue, relativism does seem to have an advantage over the current contextualist proposal. First, relativism suggests that all instances of ‘tasty’ contribute the same content to sentences. Not only must contextualism suggest that there are two quite different senses of ‘tasty’ it must also

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17 Given the significant relatedness of the objective and subjective senses of ‘tasty’, it may be more appropriate to characterize the distinction as a matter of *polysemy*. 24
suggest that the same word behaves differently in nearly every utterance in which it occurs (in virtue of being spoken by different individuals). Even the objective reading is potentially equivocal. It would seem that there is enough variability in what one might mean with a universal generalization over tasters that we ought to allow context to provide for quantifier restrictions as well.

In addition, it is unclear that the contextualist can capture the full range of linguistic behavior of predicates of personal taste just with the objective and subjective readings. For instance, we may claim that in some of its instances a sentence involving ‘tasty’ is true neither when the speaker finds the subject tasty nor when the entirety of some group finds it tasty but perhaps when something like a sufficient proportion of the population find it tasty. As a solution to this, the contextualist could perhaps posit a generic sense of ‘tasty’ in which the implicit variable is bound by a generic quantifier. But now we are forced to suggest that predicates of personal taste are ambiguous among three senses, with the potential necessity of positing even more to capture other ways in which these expressions can be used. If nothing else, following this line of attack to its natural conclusion should lead us to question how individuals involved in discussions over personal taste are ever sure that they are talking about the same thing with their different uses of the same term.

Regarding predicates of personal taste, relativism arguably provides a more elegant semantic account than this version of contextualism. But additionally, relativism is a quite general thesis in that it applies to all propositions. Thus, the semantic inelegance posited by relativism has potentially wide application. The judge parameter that relativism posits to explain the behavior of predicates of personal taste may also
explain the behavior of other expressions such as moral and aesthetic terms. However, the contextualist proposal is much more local. As a result, the contextualist may be forced to posit rampant ambiguity to equally well explain the behavior of these various terms. The semantic complexity that follows from the ambiguity approach to capturing the linguistic data suggests that even if Criterion #1 does not undermine the viability of *Faultless or Disagreement* as a description of the evidence, the contextualist proposal offered here is not sufficiently appealing to independently motivate that description.

2.3. Denying the significance of the phenomenon

Instead of denying that the dual intuitions of mutual correctness and genuine disagreement are ever simultaneously elicited, one might instead attempt to avoid the need to posit relativist semantic structure by denying that their being elicited constitutes evidence of genuine faultless disagreement. The relativist interprets the genuine disagreement intuition as tracking the incompatibility of the propositions semantically expressed by the utterances in the discourse and the mutual correctness intuition as tracking the sensitivity of the truth of these propositions to the specification of a value for the judge parameter of the circumstance of evaluation. Thus, for the relativist, both intuitions can be traced to features of the propositions semantically expressed by the utterances. However, an utterance can effect a conversation in a number of ways that go beyond mere assertion of the proposition it semantically expresses. If the intuitions can be plausibly traced to different contributions to the discourse made by the utterances, then the relativist’s conclusion is not supported by the linguistic data.
In this section, I consider absolutist proposals that attempt to avoid relativism by denying that one or the other of the intuitions elicited by discourses such as *Chili* is semantically significant. I will consider three options for implementing this strategy. To avoid the relativist conclusion, one may: (1) offer an alternative interpretation of the mutual correctness intuition, (2) offer an alternative interpretation of the genuine disagreement intuition, or (3) deny the semantic significance of linguistic intuitions generally.

2.3.1. *The significance of the mutual correctness intuition*

Linguistic intuitions provide an important source of evidence for the semanticist, but this evidence is defeasible. Intuitions regarding certain linguistic phenomena are not always clear, and in certain cases, when our intuitions come into conflict with theoretical obligations, we may think that it is our intuitions that should give way. If an immensely plausible semantic account of the predicates of personal taste can be provided that entails that one of the intuitions elicited by discourses such as *Chili* must be dismissed, then one may suggest that the success of the theory suffices as motivation for the dismissal of the intuition. Michael Glanzberg (2007) takes this approach in arguing for the ability of contextualism to account for the genuine disagreement intuition. Glanzberg’s account results in the contextualist being forced to dismiss the mutual correctness intuition, but he maintains that this loss is insignificant once the possibility of genuine disagreement has been captured.

Glanzberg agrees with the relativist that the presence of the genuine disagreement intuition in discourses such as *Chili* demands that speakers such as Sara and Tom express
incompatible propositions. However, he argues that context can plausibly be taken to fix
the content of ‘tasty’ in such a way that the same standard of taste is relevant to both
Sara’s and Tom’s utterances. Thus, some utterances of sentences containing ‘tasty’ can
express incompatible propositions without it being the case that predicates of personal
taste contribute invariant content across all contexts. Glanzberg’s account of predicates
of personal taste is modeled on that of the positive form of gradable adjectives. For a
predicate such as ‘tall’, context is taken to determine a particular value, or degree, such
that to be tall in a context is to have a height that exceeds that value. The account of
predicates of personal taste is parallel, although in addition to a degree $d$, context is
required to determine a relevant experiencer class $E$. This is because, unlike predicates
such as ‘tall’, one of the key features of predicates of personal taste is that they are
essentially tied to experience in some way. The result is that, to be tasty in a context is to
have a sufficient degree $d$ of gustatory quality as experienced by the group $E$.

If context determines the content of predicates of personal taste in this way, then
it is quite possible for individuals such as Tom and Sara to express incompatible
propositions. So long as the relevant degree and experiencer class remain constant across
the contexts of the utterances in the discourse, the propositions expressed by the
utterances will conflict. Whether the context does remain constant in the relevant regard
depends on the nature of the conversation in which the utterances occur. In order to
allow for genuine disagreement, Glanzberg must suggest that in most normal dialogues,
the context determines the same experiencer class for each utterance. If the relevant
experiencer class was a single individual, then this would likely be a rare occurrence. If,
however, context determined groups of individuals (such as humans or Americans) as the
relevant experiencer class, then it is much more likely that utterances in the same
dialogue could have the same content determined by the context; the relevant features of
the context could be presumed to remain constant across most discourses if experiencer
classes are individuated more coarsely. Of course, this context stability also means that
one of the individuals must simply be mistaken. Relative to the experiencer class that is
pertinent in the context of Sara’s and Tom’s conversation, the chili either is or is not
tasty. The result is that a contextualist approach can capture genuine disagreement, but
only at the cost of sacrificing mutual correctness.

Glanzberg’s main concern is to offer an account that captures the genuine
disagreement intuition while avoiding relativism, which is subject to the systematicity
worry outlined in the last chapter. Given the theoretical challenges faced by relativism,
Glanzberg’s account deserves consideration. An unlike the ambiguity approach outlined
in the last section, his account has the added benefit of providing a widely applicable
contextualist proposal. By modeling his account on that of gradable adjectives,
Glanzberg subsumes a large class of expressions under a single semantic approach.

Despite these considerations in its favor, I think that Glanzberg’s proposal faces a
few significant challenges. One worry is that context is asked to do a lot of work, and it
is not at all clear how it performs the task. The context must be able to determine a
relevant degree of tastiness as well as a particular class of tasters. Glanzberg suggests
that these questions of how context performs its content determining role are questions
that we shouldn’t necessarily expect to find simple answers to.

Metasemantics, especially the metasemantics of contextual parameters, is a
notoriously messy subject, about which we understand very little. This is no failure
of any given semantic analysis. For instance, though it falls on the simple side of
metasemantics, it is already a very messy issue just how demonstrated objects are identified…. Difficulties in the metasemantics here do not make us doubt the semantics itself. (Glanzberg 2007, p. 23)

While I agree that contexts may well be very complicated entities in which a number of factors serve to determine the content of certain expressions, it is certainly no boon to a theory that it leaves a significant theoretical feature unexplained. In addition, it is difficult to say what it means for a food to qualify as meeting a degree of tastiness as experienced by some group. A group does not itself constitute a taster, so the implication seems to be that the matter of meeting the relevant degree of tastiness is a matter of qualifying as tasty by the standards of the members of the group. But exactly how is this qualification met? Must the food qualify on all the members’ standards, for a paradigm member, for a proportion of the members?

In order to capture genuine disagreement over matters of taste while allowing for variation across context, Glanzberg’s proposal is forced to posit complications to the content determining role of context that are left largely unexplained. These questions regarding the way in which context fixes content in the way Glanzberg suggests can perhaps be answered with further development, but the proposal faces two other significant challenges. First, the approach effectively eliminates the ‘personal’ from personal taste. Glanzberg suggests that the important distinction between predicates of personal taste and other gradable adjectives is that they are essentially experiencer based. Consequently, the selection of an experiencer class is sufficient for representing the sense in which ‘tasty’ is personal. The loss of mutual correctness that this interpretation of ‘tasty’ entails is supposedly not a worry because once the need for relativism is eliminated by offering an account of the disagreement that does not rely on the
propositions expressed by sentences involving predicates of personal taste being invariant across all contexts, so is the need for faultless disagreement (Glanzberg 2007; p. 22). But this seems to get the motivational story backward. It is the observation that faultless disagreement seems to be pre-theoretically possible that motivates relativism, not the other way around. As Lasersohn (2005) and Köbel (2003) emphasize, the fact is that matters of taste seem to us to be matters of personal opinion. While Lasersohn’s coining of “predicates of personal taste” might have been somewhat tendentious, it certainly was not without justification. Linguistic intuitions provide only defeasible semantic evidence, but the mutual correctness intuition seems to be fairly well supported by individuals’ tendencies to represent matters of taste as matters of personal opinion. It is not clear that this intuition can be dismissed without significant loss.

Once again, however, the Glanzberg-style contextualist may suggest that if the proposed theory is immensely successful, then perhaps it is our pre-theoretic intuitions that should submit. Unfortunately, it does not appear that Glanzberg’s proposal provides this motivation. In effect, Glanzberg’s proposal suggests that the conversation, or discourse, within which the utterances occur is the relevant contextual factor that determines the content of utterances containing predicates of personal taste. This discourse model of contextualism has also been utilized by contextualists regarding knowledge ascriptions to explain how standards of knowledge can be contextually sensitive while avoiding making repugnant sentences such as “I know that I have hands, but I don’t know that I am a brain in a vat” true (Cohen 1988). By linking sensitivity of content to the broader context of the conversation instead of the individual expressions involved, the contextualist can make sense of context shifting effects that nevertheless
remain stable across single utterances. Although the discourse model is beneficial in capturing these apparent cases of context stability, it has trouble accounting for cases of apparent context shifts that occur within single sentences (Stanley 2004). For example, in the sentence, “That butterfly is small, and that elephant is small,” it appears as though the contextually determined degree of sufficient smallness has shifted mid-sentence. Without making this assumption, it is impossible to account for the relatively uncontroversial suggestion that this sentence has at least some true instances. Consequently, it seems that at least for gradable adjectives such as ‘small’, the discourse model of context-dependence is not appropriate; contexts must be fine-grained enough to allow single sentences to span multiple contexts. Since Glanzberg motivates his account based on the similarities between predicates of personal taste and other gradable adjectives, it is at least unusual that the content of predicates of personal taste would be determined by contextual factors (the nature of the discourse) that are not relevant in determining the content of gradable adjectives. I think that this worry is significant enough to suggest that the potential theoretical benefit provided by Glanzberg’s account does not outweigh the sacrifice it demands of pre-theoretic intuition.

Instead of flatly dismissing the mutual correctness intuition, the absolutist may deny that it deserves the consideration that the relativist suggests it does and attempt to offer an alternative explanation of its significance. The relativist interpretation of the mutual correctness intuition is that it tracks the truth of the propositions semantically expressed by the utterances in the discourse. Alternatively, one might explain the inclination to accept each assertion as tracking the mere appropriateness of the utterance for the circumstances. While, strictly speaking, one or both of the utterances is false, it
is an acceptable contribution to the discourse nonetheless. This approach suggests the following description of the data provided by discourses such as *Chili*.

**Appropriate**
While strictly false, one or both of the utterances is an appropriate contribution to the conversational exchange.

In effect, certain aspects of the conversational context can warrant a particular assertion regarding the tastiness of some food item despite the fact that it is known to be untrue. It is uncontroversial that the truth of an assertion and the appropriateness of expressing it can come apart. While it is true that the theory of relativity entails that there is no coherent notion of absolute simultaneity, an assertion of this proposition is not appropriate in the context of a debate as to whether a baseball player was out or safe. Conversely, we may suggest that utterances such as “I am going down to the supermarket” can offer relevant contributions to the conversation, even if there is no sense in which the supermarket is located *down* from the location of utterance.\(^{18}\)

Additionally, pace Kant, it is likely that there are situations in which it is morally appropriate to knowingly utter a falsehood. The current proposal is that the relativist, in pointing to faultless disagreement as evidence of her position, has mistaken mutual truth for mutual appropriateness. **Appropriate** could be maintained by the invariantist in order to bring the evidence in line with his claim that incompatible propositions cannot possibly both be true.

This proposal fails for two reasons. First, it does not respect a plausible view of how predicates of personal taste operate in actual use. Second, stating this proposal is

\(^{18}\) Alternative explanations of this scenario are available. One may suggest that it involves an instance of loose talk, which can be captured semantically by adding a parameter for standards of precision to the circumstance of evaluation. Under this interpretation, the utterance could in fact be true.
much easier than actually implementing it. As for the first objection, the intuition of truth seems to be firmly grounded in the meaning of predicates of personal taste. That expressions of tastiness express personal opinions is a fairly widespread view among members of the language community. Surely when speakers sincerely assert sentences involving personal taste, they at least take themselves to be saying something true. In this regard, linguistic practice regarding predicates of personal taste differs from the use of sentences such as “I am going down to the supermarket”. If pressed, one would probably admit that the supermarket is not actually directed down from the present location, but it is much less likely that a speaker would be willing to concede, just on the basis of being pressed to consider her statement, that some food item is not actually tasty. It appears that if assertions of tastiness are often merely appropriate, the individuals who make them do not often recognize that fact. The current proposal is forced to posit widespread confusion among language users regarding the truth of utterances containing predicates of personal taste. Additionally, the prevalence of uses of predicates of personal taste would appear to undermine this proposal. Even if expressions such as ‘tasty’ were at one point used in such a way that some utterances involving them were merely appropriate, it seems that such uses have become conventionalized to such an extent that it is not plausible to deny that their apparent context sensitivity is semantically driven.

As for the second objection, while an appeal to mere appropriateness may sound unassuming, it is much harder to actually implement. One reasonable way to justify that a particular intuition regarding the correctness of an utterance tracks appropriateness as opposed to truth is to point to a conversational implicature that could plausibly be
responsible for our inclination. If a plausible implicature is not forthcoming, then this suggests that the intuition is indeed a semantic one regarding the truth of the assertion. Following DeRose (1999), I will call such an approach a warranted assertibility maneuver (WAM). DeRose utilizes this test to argue that intuitions regarding knowledge ascriptions are indicative of the truth of these ascriptions and not of their appropriateness. He presents the following case of what seems to be a viable appeal to a WAM to explain a tendency to attribute falsity to an assertion and argues that cases of knowledge attribution are relevantly dissimilar.

Imagine that a speaker knows that a certain book is in her office. If, upon being asked where the book is, this speaker answers, “It is possible that the book is in my office,” there may be a tendency to suggest that what she has said is false. Now, given that truth entails possibility, the semantic content of her utterance is actually true. Instead of adjusting the semantics so that this particular utterance comes out false, we can instead appeal to the reasonable conversational maxim that one ought to make the strongest claim one is in a position to. In our example, the speaker’s knowledge regarding the book’s whereabouts makes her actual assertion much weaker than it could have been – namely, “The book is in my office.” Thus, it is the fact that the speaker is being in some sense uncooperative that explains our inclination to say that her assertion is false.

Is a similar explanation readily available in the personal taste example? While in our case the inclination to be explained away is that the utterance is true, the same test should apply as above. Is there a plausible conversational maxim that we can appeal to that would explain how an individual’s assertion of tastiness could be appropriate yet strictly false? It is difficult to imagine any general conversational principle that could
underwrite this contention. In fact, any general maxim of this sort is directly opposed to the project of successful communication. It seems that a general rule to the effect that one should say what is false is not a rule that a language community would be wont to conventionalize.

Of course, one could supply a rule to cover just certain cases. The following would do the job for the case of personal taste. “Whenever a subject is close enough to being tasty, assert that it is tasty.” There are two problems with this suggestion. First, it is a quite specific conversational rule; so specific in fact that it appears entirely ad hoc. Why, the relativist could reasonably ask, is accepting that a rule like this is in effect any less problematic than accepting that our intuitions reflect the truth of the assertions? Second, this proposal does not adequately explain our intuition. The basis for our intuition in the personal taste cases seems to be a particular understanding of taste as personal. It is not that when these examples are presented to us off hand we accept their truthfulness, and then later think, “That’s interesting. I wonder what is driving my intuition.” A better explanation is that we have a clear sense of the meaning of predicates of personal taste, and that this guides our responses to discourses such as *Chili*.

It thus appears that *Appropriate* does not provide a plausible description of the mutual correctness intuition. In light of this discussion, a second criterion for judging the adequacy of a description of the linguistic data presents itself.

*Criterion #2: Mutual truth*

An adequate explanation of the data ought to interpret the significance of the mutual correctness intuition as tracking the truth of the utterances involved.
2.3.2. The significance of the genuine disagreement intuition

The mutual correctness intuition seems to be fairly clearly grounded in the truth of the propositions expressed by the utterances in discourses such as Chili, and thus is not easily dismissed. However, the suggestion that the genuine disagreement intuition arises from a mistaken interpretation of the discourse, and thus should be dismissed, has some \textit{prima facie} plausibility. After all, dispute arising from misunderstanding has strong precedent. All too commonly, fervent disputes can be traced back to a misinterpretation of a word or a perceived implication that was not intended. Is it possible that our sense that disputes over taste involve real disagreement is nothing more than a case of misinterpretation? There are two points to keep clear on regarding this suggestion. First, the claim is not that disputes over taste occasionally involve misunderstanding. For this suggestion to be forceful, it must render disputes over taste as systematically mistaken. Second, this claim is not that the disagreement is a matter of something other than the propositions expressed (we will get to this discussion shortly); the claim is that the dispute is completely empty. This interpretation of the data could be maintained by the contextualist to bring the evidence in line with her contention that the utterances made by speakers such as Sara and Tom express compatible propositions. Since there is no \textit{actual} point of contention between the disputants, our semantic proposal does not need to account for one. The following description of the data presents itself.

\textit{No Disagreement}

Disputes over taste do not involve genuine disagreement. The participants in such disputes only mistakenly take themselves to have a point of contention between them.

This suggestion receives some support from the fact that disputes over taste often do not amount to much. While an assertion of tastiness may receive a direct retort as a response,
the argument often does not proceed beyond this point. It is not uncommon for the original speaker to reply that he was merely expressing his own approval of the taste. His conversational partner then apologizes for his outburst and the dispute is over. Given the prevalence of this occurrence, perhaps disputes over taste are merely superficial.\footnote{This fact about the progression of many disputes over taste will be discussed further in Section 4.7.}

While I grant that the above scenario is common and one that an adequate explanation of disagreement over taste must account for, the current proposal is inadequate because it fails to explain, and in fact renders mysterious, the prevalence of disputes over taste. Why do assertions of tastiness so often elicit disputatious responses, given that there is no actual conflict to substantiate the dispute? An advocate of this position is forced into positing widespread misunderstanding among speakers regarding the significance of their assertions of tastiness. This is a very undesirable result.

Certainly semantic theory need not concern itself with capturing \textit{every} potential use of an expression, but a semantic theory that predicts an expression will be used in the exact opposite way that it frequently is should be viewed with suspicion. This sense of suspicion suggests that a third criterion is appropriate.

\textit{Criterion #3: Semantic ignorance}

An adequate explanation of the data ought not to entail widespread confusion among participants engaged in disputes over taste.

While mere dismissal of the genuine disagreement intuition is not advisable, the absolutist may be able to claim that accepting it does not require us to accept that the propositions semantically expressed by the utterances are incompatible. One option for accomplishing this that is available to the contextualist is to claim that while the disagreement intuition is real, it does not arise from conflict between the utterances \textit{per}
The contextualist captures the mutual correctness intuition by maintaining that the propositions expressed by individuals such as Sara and Tom do not conflict because their utterances take place in relevantly different contexts. However, the contextualist could attempt to salvage the disagreement by maintaining that the point on which Sara and Tom disagree is which context is appropriate. That is, when two individuals engage in a dispute over taste, their dispute is not over whether the food item is tasty or not according to a shared standard; their dispute is over what the appropriate standard for judging the taste of the food is. Given this interpretation, the contextualist might explain the genuine disagreement intuition in the following way. When an individual asserts a sentence whose truth is dependent in some way on the context in which it is made, she commits herself to representing that context as appropriate for determining the truth of the sentence. Individuals may then disagree in virtue of being committed to representing different contexts as appropriate for determining the truth of the sentence uttered. Then, when the individuals extend the dispute, they are attempting to get the other to accept the superiority of their favored context. This proposal suggests the following account of the genuine disagreement intuition.

Non-linguistic Disagreement
The genuine disagreement intuition tracks a dispute between the conversationalists as to what constitutes the appropriate context for judging the tastiness of the subject.

Non-linguistic Disagreement certainly does offer a way for the contextualist to preserve disagreement in the absence of directly conflicting propositions, and it may be that some disputes involving matters of taste take this form. However, it is unclear that this interpretation accurately represents what takes place in disputes over taste generally. It seems that in a normal dispute over matters of taste, if a third party were to inquire as to
the nature of the dispute, a plausible response from one of the participants would probably take the form of, “He thinks the food is tasty, but it’s not!” Much less plausible is a response of the form “He thinks the food is appropriately judged by standard x, but it should be judged by standard y!” While this is a possible dispute that parties could engage in, it is not clearly the same dispute in which Sara and Tom are engaged in the Chili discourse. Much like No Disagreement, Non-linguistic Disagreement seems to rely for its adequacy on significant confusion among participants in a dispute over taste as to the nature of their disagreement. Thus, it violates the criterion of semantic ignorance.

Moreover, Non-linguistic Disagreement forces us to countenance a sharp distinction between the nature of disputes over taste and disputes in other realms of discourse. Yet, except for the apparent possibility of faultlessness, disagreements over taste do not appear to be different in kind from more traditional disagreements, in which the conflict is a matter of contributions to the conversation made by the utterances involved. Prima facie, an interpretation of the data that does not depend upon there being a difference in kind between disputes over taste and disputes over other matters ought to be favored. In light of this, the following additional criterion seems appropriate.

Criterion #4: Linguistic disagreement
An adequate explanation of the data ought to represent the disagreement in question as a matter of the linguistic contributions to the discourse.

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20 I address additional challenges that this report of the dispute poses for the contextualist in Ch.5.
2.3.3. The semantic significance of linguistic intuitions generally

The criteria derived from the discussion so far mandate that the intuitions elicited by disagreement over taste be recognized as tracking actual linguistic effects of the utterances. However, linguistic effects can take many forms, not all of which require recourse to semantics to explain. One potential response to the relativist challenge is to suggest that the significance of one of the intuitions elicited in discourses such as Chili can be captured by appeal to pragmatic features of the utterances as opposed to their semantic features. Criterion #2 entails that the mutual correctness intuition tracks the truth of the sentences uttered, and thus appears to be a distinctly semantic intuition. However, the genuine disagreement intuition less obviously demands semantic representation. In fact, the account I develop in Ch. 4 holds that the genuine disagreement intuition can be adequately captured pragmatically, and as a result, the sense in which discourses such as Chili involve faultless disagreement can be accounted for in a way that is consistent with a contextualist semantics for the predicates of personal taste. The appeal to conversational pragmatics provides the absolutist with additional linguistic structure that can be put to use in answering the relativist challenge. However, not just any appeal to the pragmatic effects of utterances provides an adequate explanation of the linguistic data that the relativist points to. To bring this out, I will consider an approach to linguistic theorizing due to Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore (henceforth, C&L) that makes heavy use of the pragmatic effects of utterances to explain various linguistic phenomena.

C&L (2005) argue that certain arguments that have been provided in favor of contextualist proposals for the semantics of certain expressions threaten to over
generalize to the point where accepting them as semantically significant would have the result of making successful communication completely mysterious. Their discussion is directed toward what they label *context shifting arguments* (CSAs).\(^\text{21}\) A contextualist offers a CSA in favor of the context sensitivity of some expression \(e\) by “soliciting intuitions that what is said, stated, asserted, or claimed by an utterance \(u\) of an (unambiguous) sentence \(S\) containing \(e\) need not be the same as what is said, etc., by another utterance \(u'\) of \(S\)” (C&L 2005, p. 40). The claim made by the contextualist is that our intuitions regarding the use of certain expressions indicate that those expressions contribute different content to a sentence depending on the context in which the sentence is uttered. C&L encapsulate their worry about this argumentative strategy in the thesis that they label GEN.

\[(\text{GEN})\] With sufficient ingenuity, a CSA can be provided for any sentence whatsoever, and consequently, for any expression. (C&L 2005, p. 40)

GEN claims that if the context is described in just the right way, one can elicit nearly any intuition regarding what a person in that context says by uttering a sentence. The worry is that contextualist theses that are based on CSAs are not stable. If CSAs suffice to show that certain expressions are semantically context sensitive, then they should also show that *all* expressions are context sensitive. In light of GEN, C&L maintain that moderate contextualism (which suggests only that certain expressions, such as quantifier phrases and gradable adjectives, are context sensitive) collapses into radical contextualism (which maintains that no sentence, independent of the context of utterance, expresses a

\(^{21}\) C&L also address what they call *incompleteness arguments* for contextualism. For my purposes here, we can direct our attention to their discussion of CSAs.
The problem posed by the collapse of moderate into radical contextualism is that radical contextualism renders mysterious how individuals are able to successfully communicate at all. It is very rare that any of us is aware of the complete nature of the context in which an utterance is made, and yet, we often accurately report on the utterances of others despite the fact that we are in contexts far removed from that of the original utterance. Even when we are participating in a face to face conversation, there are many features of the context of which we will not be aware. If nothing else, the intentional states of the other participants will not be perfectly transparent to us, and these are certainly important features of the context of their utterances. Despite our significant ignorance, we are quite good at interpreting the meanings of the sentences we read and hear. If radical contextualism were true, this success would be completely mysterious. The report of an utterance that I receive in one context should mean something completely different from what the original utterance meant in its context. C&L argue that because cross-contextual communication is as successful as it is, radical contextualism must be false. And since moderate contextualism collapses into radical contextualism, arguments that purportedly support moderate contextualism, such as CSAs, must be unsound.

In addition to their argument against contextualist interpretations of the intuitions elicited in CSAs, C&L provide a positive account of those intuitions. Their proposal is the conjunction of two views: semantic minimalism and speech act pluralism. Semantic minimalism is the thesis that there is a minimal proposition that is expressed by any

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22 Not everyone agrees with C&L that moderate contextualism necessarily collapses into radical contextualism. See Maitra (2007) and Pagin and Pelletier (2007) for two slightly different defenses of the stability of moderate contextualism.
utterance of a sentence, and that proposition is the semantic content of that sentence. Speech act pluralism is the view that in addition to the minimal semantic proposition, a great many other propositions are potentially conveyed by an utterance of a sentence. According to C&L, it is the fact that the speech act can serve to convey this additional information that explains the apparent context-sensitivity of certain of the expressions contained in that sentence. By accepting the conjunction of semantic minimalism and speech act pluralism, C&L can maintain that the intuitions pointed to in CSAs do not track semantic features of the sentence uttered; instead, they track pragmatic features of the speech act. They agree that context can be very influential in determining information that an utterance conveys, but they insist that this phenomenon is of no interest to the semanticist qua semanticist.

Following this lead, Cappelen (forthcoming) appeals to speech act pluralism as a means of accounting for the phenomenon of faultless disagreement. He argues that both the contextualist and the invariantist can make sense of the intuitions pointed to as evidence of relativism by simply combining their semantic account with what he calls pluralistic content relativism (PCR). In effect, PCR combines the thesis of speech act pluralism with the claim that what propositions an utterance expresses may be sensitive to the context from which the utterance is interpreted. Accepting the consequences of PCR easily brings the intuITIONS elicited by discourses such as Chili into alignment with both the contextualist and the invariantist proposals for the semantics of predicates of

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23 Since C&L do allow that there is a small set of genuinely context sensitive expressions, this statement must be qualified. Sentences containing expressions from the Basic Set of context sensitive expressions do semantically express different propositions on different occasions of their use. The Basic Set is a slight expansion (to include terms such as ‘local’ and ‘enemy’) of the set of indexical terms for which Kaplan (1989) developed his theory of demonstratives.
personal taste. The apparent challenge for these absolutist proposals was that no single pair of propositions can be such that they are incompatible and yet both true. However, if PCR is true, then in addition to the propositions they semantically express, Sara’s and Tom’s utterances also express many other propositions relative to a context of interpretation. It is thus quite possible that when interpreted from some context, their utterances express at least one true proposition and at least one proposition that contradicts one expressed by the other. Consequently, PCR provides an easy means for the absolutist to answer the relativist challenge.

Despite this easy answer, a mere appeal to speech act pluralism does not provide a very satisfying account of the linguistic data. Its explanatory inadequacy stems from the fact that speech act pluralism is an immensely prodigious theory. It is capable of providing an interpretation for nearly any linguistic phenomenon that comes its way. But what it does not do is explain what feature or features of the speech act result in a particular proposition being conveyed. In fact, C&L suggest that the nature of speech act content is such that it will not submit to any sort of systematized account (C&L 2005, p. 190). There are so many different things that a sentence can convey in different contexts that an attempt to derive them from the semantic content of the sentence is just misguided. Yet, it is this very lack of systematicity that makes an unsupplemented appeal to speech act pluralism an unsatisfactory explanation of the genuine disagreement intuition that is elicited by discourses such as Chili.

The main inadequacy of the speech act pluralist strategy is that it does not provide for relevant differences between various intuitive responses that individuals have to linguistic phenomena. It treats all non-semantic effects of language use as on a par.
However, it is not evident that all purported linguistic intuitions deserve equal treatment.

To bring this out, consider the following two cases, in which two different messages are conveyed to Charlotte on the basis of her boss’s utterance.

1. Charlotte has had a bad morning. She slept through her alarm, there was no hot water for her shower, she burnt and couldn’t eat her breakfast, and when trying to hail a taxi, a car splashed a puddle onto her new skirt. She arrived late to work and while she gave the presentation she had been working on for weeks, her boss showed absolutely no interest. When her presentation ended, her boss said, “I need to see you in my office.” Charlotte wondered whether she should pack up her desk now or later.

2. Charlotte’s morning was like any other. She hit her snooze button two times, took a hot shower, ate toast with jam for breakfast, and took a taxi to work. She gave her quarterly report, to which her boss showed little interest. After her presentation had ended, her boss said, “I need to see you in my office.” Charlotte wondered what her boss’s comments on her report would be.

In each of these cases, the boss’s statement has conveyed a particular message to Charlotte. This message goes beyond the minimal proposition expressed by the statement; presumably something along the lines of the proposition that Boss needs to see Charlotte in Boss’s office. In case (1), the boss’s utterance has conveyed the message that Charlotte is to be fired. In case (2), the message conveyed is that the boss will be commenting on Charlotte’s performance. One may perhaps attempt to accommodate these different messages semantically by pointing to variation in the meaning of ‘see’.

Depending on the context, this expression may mean “perceive via sight,” “have congress with,” or even “give the pink slip to”. Thus, we could explain Charlotte’s various interpretations of the boss’s utterance by positing an ambiguity. The speech act pluralist, on the other hand, can deny the semantic significance of these different messages and suggest that the different senses apparently attributable to ‘see’ are characteristics of the interpretation of the speech act alone.
The semantic proposal for ‘see’ is not well motivated. The thought that ‘see’ is somehow ambiguous in the way described is just not plausible. If nothing else, it is a direct violation of Grice’s Razor. Instead, appealing to pragmatic principles to explain the relevant messages that are conveyed seems to be the right strategy. However, the speech act pluralist approach glosses over an important distinction between the two cases above. While both the “have congress with” and “give the pink slip to” interpretations of the boss’s utterance are best accounted for pragmatically, they are not of equal significance. The “have congress with” interpretation is much more salient than the “give the pink slip to” interpretation. There may be only a handful of scenarios in which the utterance of this sentence could reasonably convey the latter, and even within those scenarios that interpretation may be missed. It is quite conceivable that in case (1) the boss did not even intend the indicated message at all, which is consistent with the claim of PCR that relative to Charlotte’s context of interpretation of the utterance, it does express that message. However, the “have congress with” interpretation is much more stable. There are a number of possible cases – including one’s that differ greatly from the case presented – in which utterances involving ‘see’ are quite reasonably interpreted in this way. It seems that to relegate both of these interpretations to the slop heap of speech act pluralism ignores an important distinction between pragmatic effects of utterances.

In general, it seems possible to distinguish different intuitions regarding linguistic phenomena based on the scope of cases in which they are elicited. I will refer to this scope as a measure of the robustness of the intuition. An intuition that is elicited in a relatively large class of cases is relatively robust, and an intuition that is narrowly elicited is attenuated. I do not pretend that linguistic intuition robustness is a precise concept.
Nor do I claim to have a method for determining, based on robustness, when a particular intuition deserves a particular semantic or pragmatic treatment. However, I do suggest that there is reason to recognize grades of robustness, and that there is a pull to demand different treatment for intuitions that have significantly different levels of robustness. While an appeal to mere speech act pluralism may be adequate for highly attenuated linguistic intuitions, the same dismissal does not seem appropriate for their more robust counterparts.

This inequality of treatment has precedent in the philosophy of language. Since Grice, relatively robust intuitions regarding the conveyed meaning of an utterance are often given explanations in terms of conversational implicature. A strategy of explaining intuitions based on conversational implicature accomplishes two things. First, it explains how a sentence may have conveyed the message it did in the conversational context. Second, it explains why sentences of that type can be expected to convey the message they do in similar contexts. By deriving the conveyed message from reasonable cooperative principles that guide conversation, appeal to conversational implicature provides a full fledged explanation of the conveyed message. While speech act pluralism may be able to accomplish the first task, a mere appeal to the fact that many different things can be conveyed by a single utterance unsatisfactorily addresses the second.

Part of the importance of apparent faultless disagreement, and why so much ink has been spilled in attempting to address it, is that the intuitions involved appear to be relatively robust. Disputes over matters of taste are rather common, and the intuition that these disputes involve genuine disagreement is similarly widely elicited. If an interpretation of the linguistic data appeals to pragmatic effects of the utterances to
ground the disagreement, it ought to also explain why a wide range of discourses tend to
elicit the intuitions that they do. The robustness of the intuitions elicited by example
cases such as *Chili* commends one final restriction on an adequate explanation of the
linguistic data.

*Criterion #5: Intuition robustness*

An adequate explanation of the data ought to respect the significance of the intuitions. It must not just explain how the phenomenon can arise; it must explain why the intuitions are as robust as they are.

While an acceptance of speech act pluralism may provide the initial framework within
which an absolutist explanation of the linguistic data can be provided, it does not by itself
offer an adequate explanation. Unless the story of how the genuine disagreement
intuition is elicited can be filled out in a way that is consistent with an absolutist proposal
for the semantics of predicates of personal taste, the relativist proposal remains the best
account of the data.

2.4. *Conclusion*

The preceding discussion of various absolutist responses to the relativist challenge
suggests that certain restrictions must be placed on adequate representations of the data. I
have presented five criteria that I take it to be important for any semantic account of the
predicates of personal taste to respect in explaining the significance of the linguistic data.
In the chapters that follow, I develop my favored account of the semantics of predicates
of personal taste and the corresponding explanation of the mutual correctness and
genuine disagreement intuitions. I argue that a particular contextualist account can
capture the intuitions involved in cases of apparent faultless disagreement in a way that
respects the five criteria developed above. My strategy is to represent the genuine
disagreement intuition as tracking pragmatic effects of the utterances within the
conversational context, and to do so in a way that respects the robustness of that intuition.
As a result, while the propositions semantically expressed by Sara’s and Tom’s
utterances are not incompatible, Sara and Tom do have a genuine point of contention that
derives from their pragmatic commitments. In the next chapter I argue that an appeal to
pragmatic commitment to ground disagreement is well motivated.
3. Disagreement and Pragmatic Conflict

3.1. The semantic conflict presumption

The criterion of *Linguistic Disagreement* developed in the last chapter mandates that a semantic account of predicates of personal taste respect the linguistic significance of disagreement over taste. This means that discourses such as *Chili* should be represented as involving what I will refer to as *linguistic disagreement*; that is, disagreement that arises from conflicting features of the utterances in the discourse. A semantic account that is forced to appeal to meta-linguistic or non-linguistic sources of the conflict involved in disputes over taste does not adequately represent the force of the genuine disagreement intuition. For this reason, a contextualist account that represents the disagreement as a matter of conflicting beliefs regarding the appropriate context misrepresents the linguistic evidence. By representing the disagreement as a matter of conflict between the semantic contents of the disputants’ utterances, relativism adequately respects *Linguistic Disagreement*. This understanding of the genuine disagreement intuition – that it is driven by a relation of incompatibility between two propositions semantically expressed by utterances of the discourse – suggests that the disagreement is a matter of what we may call *semantic conflict*.

The presumption that relativism offers the only plausible explanation of faultless disagreement seems to me to be based on the tacit assumption that semantic conflict exhausts the sources of linguistic disagreement. In other words, two utterances in a discourse conflict if and only if they semantically express incompatible propositions. If this were the case, then contextualism, which maintains that the utterances involved in *Chili* do not express incompatible propositions, could not possibly capture the genuine
disagreement intuition. This, however, seems to me to be an overly restrictive view of linguistic disagreement. In this section, I argue that what I call the semantic conflict presumption is mistaken. My argument consists of three parts. First, I argue that linguistic disagreement can be generated independently of the semantic expression of incompatible propositions. I provide a number of example discourses that intuitively involve linguistic disagreement, and I argue that in each of these cases the conflict that intuitively generates the disagreement cannot be traced to the semantic contents of the utterances involved. Instead, the utterances are in conflict due to certain of their non-semantic, or pragmatic, features. Second, I question the motivation for the semantic conflict presumption by appealing to an intuitive notion of disagreement. Lastly, I suggest that rejecting the semantic conflict presumption and recognizing linguistic disagreement generated by pragmatic conflict allows for a neat explanation of such phenomena as mistaken disputes.

The recognition of pragmatic conflict as a potential source of linguistic disagreement has some important consequences for the debate over faultless disagreement. Most importantly, it provides an extra dimension of analysis for reconciling faultless disagreement with an absolutist semantic framework. It suggests that the challenge of faultless disagreement is not to capture the dual intuitions within a semantic account; instead, the linguistic data need only be consistent with the semantic account. As a result, an appeal to pragmatic conflict is available to any semantic approach. As I will argue in the next chapter, contextualism is well positioned to utilize

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24 Of course, as it is applied in an absolutist framework, non-semantic conflict does not capture genuine faultless disagreement. The absolutist will still maintain that one or other of the parties must be in some
pragmatic conflict to account for the linguistic data. Moreover, it can do so in a way that meets the criteria proposed in the previous chapter for providing an adequate explanation of the data.

3.2. Example disagreements

I will now present a series of dialogues that seem to involve disagreement. In examining these dialogues, I hope to establish three things: (1) The two parties do indeed disagree; the intuitive sense that the discourse involves disagreement is genuine. (2) The disagreement involved cannot be explained in terms of conflicting propositions semantically expressed by the utterances. (3) Despite the compatibility of the propositions they semantically express, the utterances nevertheless conflict. The conclusion I draw from this discussion is that the semantic conflict presumption does not hold of linguistic disagreement generally.

Dialogue #1: Bob and Shirley are discussing the latest gossip.

Bob: Did you hear? Sam and Pat got married and they had a baby.
Shirley: Actually, that’s not quite right. They had a baby and they got married.
Bob: Are you sure? Let’s do the math.

In the above dialogue, I take it that Bob and Shirley disagree. Their disputative language certainly suggests that they take themselves to disagree, but it seems additionally, that their dispute is not a result of any sort of confusion. They actually disagree. Intuitively, the disputed issue is the temporal order of the events they are discussing. The propositions their utterances express, though, do not explicitly indicate any sort of way mistaken. However, this mistake can potentially be traced to pragmatic effects of their utterances, and this is consistent with them both expressing true propositions.
temporality. Each utters a sentence that is composed of two sentential clauses conjoined by the connective ‘and’. Logically, these sentences are of the form P&Q and Q&P, respectively. Since ‘&’ represents a symmetric relation, it appears as though these two propositions are semantically equivalent. If this is the case, then the disagreement cannot be traced to semantic conflict.

Generally, this sort of issue in which ‘and’ is interpreted as ‘and then’ on a particular occasion of its use is taken to be a generalized conversational implicature generated by inference from the Gricean maxim of Manner, which mandates the cooperative individuals be perspicuous with their presentation of their conversational contributions (See Levinson (1983), esp. p. 108)). While the connective ‘and’ is semantically symmetric, the conversational context can lead the audience to infer an asymmetry. In this case, the subject matter of the discussion lends itself to the inference of a temporal ordering for the events. Consequently, we can trace the point of conflict to conflicting conversational implicatures. Whereas Bob has implicated that the marriage preceded the birth of the child, Shirley has implicated the opposite order of events. This pragmatic effect explains the intuitive presence of disagreement.

Of course, we need not interpret the propositions expressed in this dialogue as being equivalent. One could resurrect semantic conflict by proposing a semantic ambiguity in the term ‘and’ between the symmetric and the asymmetric readings. It is relatively well accepted, however, that this move should be avoided. Proposals of semantic ambiguity such as this result in a severe complication of the semantics because there is little reason to think that these are the only two senses that ‘and’ can have. It is

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25 The difficulties associated with positing ambiguity in ‘and’ are discussed at greater length in Levinson (1983, pp. 98-100).
preferable, if an alternative explanation is available, to avoid countenancing multiple semantic interpretations of the logical connectives in order to simplify the representation of the entailment relations that they can enter into. By appealing to pragmatic considerations such as conversational implicature, we can maintain a relatively simple picture of the semantics of natural language not far divorced from logic.

One may alternatively suggest that Bob and Shirley do not actually disagree. It may be argued that Shirley’s disputative language is mistaken. This proposal is, I think, in deep conflict with intuition. Additionally, Shirley’s disputative response seems quite sufficiently justified by the suggestion that Bob is assumed to be cooperative and as such is being perspicuous with his presentation of the information. Bob can reasonably be taken to be committed by the conversational maxim of Manner to a specific temporal order for the events he has introduced. Moreover, this commitment is explained by pragmatic considerations regarding Bob’s utterance in the conversational context. Consequently, we seem to have here a discourse that involves conflicting utterances, and yet, the conflict is not generated by their expressing incompatible propositions.

Dialogue #2: Bob and Shirley are engrossed in a soccer match on television.
Shirley: Beckham is a decent soccer player.
Bob: No he’s not! He’s amazing!

In this dialogue, Bob and Shirley appear to be having a dispute regarding the skill level of a particular soccer player. However, the semantic interpretation of their utterances does not seem to bear this out. Shirley asserts (roughly) the proposition that Beckham is a decent soccer player, and Bob asserts (again roughly) the proposition that Beckham is an amazing soccer player. These propositions are not incompatible. In fact, taking skill
level to be a scalar property, Bob’s assertion entails Shirley’s. Despite this, they genuinely disagree. As in Dialogue #1, this disagreement involves an implicature. In this case it is the scalar implicature that ‘decent’ is intended as ‘not more than decent’.

Scalar implicatures are most commonly taken to be conversational phenomena as opposed to conventional. This suggests that such effects are distinctly pragmatic. However, this position is not uncontroversial. As King and Stanley (2005) show, some scalar implicatures can be captured semantically. Their attention is directed to scalar implicatures arising from quantifier expressions involving focus. King and Stanley present their case in response to claims of pragmatic intrusion, which is the view that determinate truth conditions for sentences cannot be supplied in the absence of supplying the precise context in which the sentence is uttered. This is essentially the view that semantics, as a theory of sentence types, is not a viable program of study independent of pragmatics. Their proposal is meant to show that since the purported pragmatic effects of focus can be represented semantically, the ability of a semantic theory to provide adequate truth conditions is not undermined. Notice that pragmatic intrusion is not what I am advocating here. I think it is quite reasonable to suggest that the truth conditions for Bob and Shirley’s utterances are fairly easily represented as the propositions I have given above. What this suggests is that, once again, conflict is not purely a matter of incompatible truth conditions; it can sometimes be grounded in other effects that utterances have on the conversation. In any case, I think the cancelability of the

26 Discussions of the distinction between conventional and conversational implicature, and the status of scalar implicatures as conversational can be found in Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (2000, pp. 245-248) and Kadmon (2001, pp. 205-6).
27 Glanzberg (2005) also gives a case for representing aspects of focus semantically.
implicature in the present example is telling against its semantic significance.\textsuperscript{28} Shirley could reasonably respond to Bob’s outburst by saying, “I didn’t mean that he is \textit{merely} decent.” If the implicature was a part of the semantic content of Shirley’s original statement, then this plausible response to Bob’s rebuttal would amount to “I didn’t mean what I meant,” which is surely not its force.

Cancelability may be taken to indicate that the disagreement is not more than superficial, but this would be a mistake. Shirley’s canceling of the implicature may act as a way of resolving the disagreement, but this does not mean that there was no conflict to begin with. This can be brought out by contrasting the present case with one that has only the superficial appearance of conflict. For example, Bob would not be disagreeing with Shirley were he to respond to her assertion of, “I’m hungry,” with, “I’m not hungry at all.” Bob’s response in the soccer player case is reasonably intended as argumentative in a way that his response is not in the hunger case. This is because in the former, but not in the latter, Shirley can be taken to be committed to a position that is incompatible with the position Bob presents with his utterance. And in the soccer player case, Shirley’s commitment arises from a conversational implicature.

\textit{Dialogue #3:} Bob is an extreme sports enthusiast. He believes that the life well lived is one that is pushed to the extreme. Shirley has hippy tendencies and believes that life should be lived calmly and peacefully.

Bob: Well, you know, Shirley, there is only one way to live.
Shirley: Indeed, there is only one way to live, Bob.

\textsuperscript{28} Although, as Grice (1989; pp.44-45) emphasizes, cancelability does not constitute a sufficient condition for an effect’s being a conversational implicature. Grice’s concern is with instances of “loose talk” in which certain uses of expressions are taken to be acceptable despite being strictly incorrect. While we may be inclined to say that Shirley’s use of ‘decent’ is somewhat infelicitous, I don’t think we are led to suggest that it is strictly false.
This dialogue differs from the first two in that it does not contain any disputative language. Not only that, it appears that Bob and Shirley actually agree. After all, they have asserted the same sentence. However, I submit that there is also a clear sense in which they disagree. I want to say that there is a conflict over the particular way of life that each party takes to be the unique best one, and that despite (or in addition to) their superficial agreement, they actually disagree. This suggests that the genuine disagreement intuition is not limited to cases involving overt disputatious language. I maintain also that this dialogue involves linguistic disagreement. This means that the conflict must somehow be represented in the utterances involved. If this is the case, then the conflict between Bob and Shirley must stem from their picking out different referents with their different uses of the descriptive phrase “way to live”. It appears as though Bob’s and Shirley’s uses of the descriptive phrase generate what we might call referential commitments, and it is these commitments that are in conflict in this dialogue.

Yet, to what feature of their utterances can we trace these referential commitments? At face, it seems that Bob and Shirley have asserted the exact same proposition, roughly: \( \exists! x [\text{Way of life}(x)] \). If this is the case, then their disagreement cannot be traced to a conflict in the propositions semantically expressed. However, it may be suggested that since the descriptive element in their utterances is being used referentially, the proposition semantically expressed by each of the speakers is not the one suggested but an object-dependent proposition. Since the particular object referred to by each speaker is different, the propositions expressed are different and incompatible. Consequently, the conflict can be traced to the semantics of descriptions. This move relies on the ambiguity between attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions.
that was introduced by Donnellan (1966) and on there being distinct semantic
interpretations for each type of use. For attributive uses, the traditional Russellian
semantics for definite descriptions is sufficient; but for referential uses, which we must
take Bob’s and Shirley’s uses to be if we are to make sense of their disagreement, our
semantics must treat definite descriptions as referring expressions. However, it has been
extensively argued (e.g., Kripke (1977), Neale (1990)) that this move represents an
unwarranted violation of Grice’s Razor. Instead of positing semantic ambiguity, the
referential commitment apparent in some uses of descriptions can be adequately
explained as a matter of conversational pragmatics. As Kripke argues, the phenomenon
that Donnellan points to would arise even in a language community where it was
stipulated that definite descriptions have only the Russellian sense. This suggests that we
should understand the source of the conflict between Bob and Shirley as stemming from
pragmatic effects of their utterances, specifically, the *speaker meaning* of the utterances.

That the referential commitment is a conversational matter as opposed to a
semantic one is further supported by the fact that it seems to be cancelable. Either Bob or
Shirley could have stated, “There is only one way to live, but I don’t have any clue what
it might be.” This assertion does not seem contradictory, even if it is slightly odd. In
light of this, I contend that the best explanation of the case above is that Bob and Shirley
assert the same proposition, and that their disagreement is generated by conflicting
referential commitments that arise from the conversational context. Moreover, the
objection that Bob’s and Shirley’s disagreement is in some sense not real or derivative is
not persuasive. As Klein (1981) argues, the referential use of descriptions, despite being
generated by pragmatics, seems to be the primary use. It is most reasonable to take
someone who uses a definite description to be committed to some particular referent of that description. Until the commitment is explicitly canceled in some way, conversational participants can reasonably dispute the utterance based on conflicting applications of a referent for the description. This suggests that the sense we get that Bob and Shirley disagree is well founded. It is just that the conflict that underwrites their disagreement is generated pragmatically, not semantically.

3.3. Disagreement and commitment

What cases like those above reveal is that in locating disagreement, the sentences uttered, even controlling for context-sensitive expressions, cannot be considered in isolation. Utterances are multifaceted events. They can affect the conversational exchange in many ways, and the contribution provided by an utterance can potentially be objected to on a variety of different counts. Because there is a potential for various sources of conflict in a conversational exchange, our sense that a certain exchange involves disagreement need not lead us directly to the propositions semantically expressed by the disputants to locate the conflict.

Points of conflict within a conversation can be generated in many ways. In general, they seem to be a result of what speakers can reasonably be taken by their conversational partners to be committed to. The semantic content of an utterance represents one such commitment that a speaker has, but as the cases provided indicate, it does not exhaust conversational commitment. Certain pragmatic effects of offering an utterance in a particular conversational context can also generate commitments on the part of the speaker. The semantic content of a sentence does not exhaust what can be
expressed by an utterance of that sentence. Nor do the semantic contents of sentences exhaust the sources of conflict between conversationalists who utter those sentences. It is interesting that the semantic conflict presumption is as seductive as it seems to be. Certainly, when two people in the course of conversation express incompatible propositions (assuming they are cooperative and not just spouting off irrelevant assertions) they can be said to disagree. Semantic conflict certainly seems to be sufficient for disagreement, but that it should be necessary does not seem to fit the facts at all.

Disagreement is a widespread phenomenon, and the fact that it is so prevalent and varied suggests that any attempt to fit all of it into a single mold is deeply misguided. Of course, taking the opposite extreme does not seem right either. We want to be able to provide some account of how and why a particular disagreement arises, and taking disagreement to be a wholly disparate phenomenon makes this much more difficult. By interpreting disagreement as arising from reasonable commitments of conversationalists, we have a strategy for classifying and predicting disagreements. The discussion above shows that disagreement generating commitments divide into at least two distinct species – semantic and pragmatic. But it seems further that relevantly different pragmatic sources may underwrite the conflict involved in different conversational disagreements. For instance, scalar implicature generated the conflict in Dialogue #2 whereas it was referential commitment that generated the conflict in Dialogue #3. The varied nature of disagreement implies that our linguistic intuitions regarding disagreement can track a number of different features. At the same time, though, it is not the case that the nature of linguistic disagreement cannot be represented in any principled, systematic fashion.
While there may be a number of various sources of conflict, they form rather close knit groups based on the manner in which they generate reasonable commitments on the part of conversational participants.

Understanding the nature of linguistic disagreement in this way allows us to glide between two opposing stances on the significance of the genuine disagreement intuition. Relativism seems to be motivated by an overly simple view of the nature of the genuine disagreement intuition; it is not the case that all interpretations of this intuition must ground it in conflicting semantic commitments of the conversational participants. But it also seems that explanations (such as that offered by the speech act pluralist) that fail to recognize the genuine disagreement intuition as grounded in general commitment generating features of utterances is equally mistaken; it is not sufficient to explain the genuine disagreement intuition in terms of the trivial fact that utterances convey a great deal of information. Not all information that is potentially conveyed by an utterance is equally capable of grounding a speaker’s conflict generating commitments.

3.4. Mistaken disputes

In addition to explaining intuitive cases of disagreement, another benefit of recognizing pragmatic conflict is that it allows us to make sense of the prevalence of disagreement, both genuine and mistaken. If disagreement was strictly derived from the semantic expression of incompatible propositions, then it would be a wonder how often disagreement takes place. In particular, it seems we would have to posit a deep confusion among language speakers regarding the nature of their language to explain the prevalence of mistaken disagreement. If genuine disagreement was limited in the way that the
semantic conflict presumption suggests, then one would think that disputatious responses
to utterances in conversation would be similarly limited. But this isn’t the case; people
engage in disputes quite regularly that only after a decent amount of debate do they come
to realize that their conflict was only illusory. By recognizing that conflict can be
generated by much more than just the semantic force of an utterance, the multi-faceted
nature of discourse is made available to explain the plenitude of conversational disputes.
People are inclined to engage in disputes so frequently because there are a great many
ways in which conflict can be engendered. And disputes are often found to be empty
because conversations are complex events whose underlying nature is not always clearly
revealed at the outset.
4. Contextualism and Disagreement over Taste

4.1. A contextualist proposal

The linguistic data provided by discourses such as Chili might help us decide the question of whether an adequate semantics of natural language must countenance the relativity of propositional truth to a perspective. Any proposed absolutist semantic theory to account for this data must offer an explanation of the significance of the dual intuitions of mutual correctness and genuine disagreement. In Ch. 2, I suggested that five conditions be placed on the adequacy of such an explanation. In this chapter, I argue that the linguistic data do not force us to countenance relativism. I do so by offering an interpretation of the linguistic phenomenon of faultless disagreement that renders it consistent with a contextualist semantics for the predicates of personal taste and also respects the five criteria on an adequate interpretation. The explanation of the significance of the intuitions elicited by discourses such as Chili that I propose has the following characteristics.

(1) The intuition of mutual correctness derives from the semantic context sensitivity of predicates of personal taste. More specifically, predicates of personal taste have as part of their underlying argument structure an argument slot that selects for individuals. The value of this argument place is the salient experiencer of the context. The fact that the two apparently conflicting utterances take place in relevantly different contexts is what explains their both expressing true propositions.

(2) The genuine disagreement intuition derives from conflicting commitments of the participants in the dispute. These commitments are generated by certain pragmatic effects of their utterances in the conversation. While the propositions expressed by the utterances do not semantically conflict (they are not incompatible), there is pragmatic conflict.

(3) There need not be a single pragmatic principle that underwrites the genuine disagreement intuition in every instance of disagreement over personal taste.
Instead, the conflicting commitments may be generated by different pragmatic effects in different conversations.

4.2. The non-universality of the genuine disagreement intuition

I will begin by elaborating on (3). In the last chapter, I suggested that linguistic disagreement is multifarious. While semantic conflict seems to have only one relevant source – incompatibility between propositions – pragmatic conflict can stem from various features of utterances in conversation. Consequently, viewing the source of the disagreement in disputes over taste as pragmatic as opposed to semantic encourages a particular understanding of the linguistic data. If the presence of actual conflict is a matter of the conversational context, then we would reasonably expect that disagreement over taste itself should be highly context sensitive. Different discourses involving disagreement over taste may involve conflict that stems from different sources, and, importantly, some purported disagreements over taste may not involve actual conflict at all. This differs from the interpretation of the data that is most reasonable for the relativist account. Since relativism explains both of the intuitions involved in faultless disagreement in terms of the semantics of predicates of personal taste, disagreement over taste is best viewed by the relativist as a general linguistic phenomenon deserving of a unified explanation.

By suggesting that disagreement over taste is best explained in terms of conflicting commitments generated by pragmatic principles, the contextualist offers a description of the linguistic phenomenon in which disagreement over taste is not as unified a phenomenon as the relativist construal of it suggests. We already have here a point of departure between the relativist and contextualist explanation of faultless
disagreement, and a potential means of deciding between them. I argued in Ch. 2 that the genuine disagreement intuition is relatively robust, and that it accordingly deserves an explanation that respects this robustness. It was this fact that exposed the inadequacy of an appeal to mere speech act pluralism to explain the linguistic data. However, the relativist may now suggest that the current proposal commits the same foul. By claiming that the genuine disagreement intuition may be explained differently in different cases, the contextualist undervalues the significance of disagreement over taste. Prima facie, the ability to provide a unified account of a general linguistic phenomenon is a point in favor of the relativist.

Despite the robustness of the genuine disagreement intuition, however, it is not clear that it is universally elicited in disputes over taste. Cappelen and Lepore (2006) make essentially this point in a discussion of Richard’s (2004) appeal to relativism to capture cross-contextual disagreement in another realm of discourse.29 As I mentioned in Ch. 1, Richard thinks that certain conversations lend themselves to accommodation, and that this requires relativism regarding certain contextual features. Richard’s contention is that contextualists regarding gradable adjectives such as ‘rich’ ought also to be relativists if they are to make sense of how people who apply different standards in judging richness can nevertheless disagree in their attributions. Cappelen and Lepore point out that by describing Richard’s example cases in the right way it is very easy to get respondents to report that there is no disagreement between the parties; that instead, they are just talking past one another. This suggests that by further describing the conversational context, the

29 Of course, Cappelen and Lepore take their argument to have a different consequence than I draw from it. They would be inclined to suggest that the genuine disagreement intuition is not very ‘genuine’ at all. I suggest that their argument succeeds only in placing restriction on the robustness of the intuition.
standard for richness that each speaker is utilizing can be made salient, and making the appropriate standard salient has the effect that in the cases so described, the genuine disagreement intuition dissipates. Thus, it appears that the elicitation of the genuine disagreement intuition is sensitive to the description of the conversational context.

This appears also to extend to predicates of personal taste. If Sara’s and Tom’s utterances in the Chili discourse come as responses to the question, “What do you think of the chili?” I am far less inclined to suggest that they have disagreed with each other. Instead, the prompt seems to make salient that what is being elicited is their opinions. When this is made clear, the intuition that they have disagreed with each other loses its pull. I am instead inclined to suggest that their utterances are clearly compatible contributions to the current discourse.

This phenomenon should not sit well with any theory that suggests that the conflict in disagreements over taste is generated semantically. A mere filling in of details of the circumstances surrounding the utterances should not change what semantic contribution an expression makes. However, that respondents would make different reports of the disagreement when features of the conversational context are filled in is consistent with the proposal that the disagreement is pragmatically generated. If the conflict arises from what the individuals can be reasonably said to be committed to, then we would expect our reports of the conversation to change when different details are provided. The extent of individuals’ reasonable commitments is a factor of the information available to them, and when additional information regarding the nature of the discourse is provided, the pragmatic commitments of the individuals involved will change accordingly.
The fact that the genuine disagreement intuition depends on the particular presentation of the conversational setting suggests that the ability to provide a generalized account of disagreement over personal taste is not a significant advantage for the relativist. Even stronger, it seems to provide reason not to offer a semantic explanation of the genuine disagreement intuition at all. Instead, one can adequately respect the robustness of the intuition without maintaining that it is generated by a single linguistic effect common to all disputes over taste.

4.3. *The case-by-case approach to disagreement over taste*

In light of the fact that the sources of disagreement can be various and that the genuine disagreement intuition is not universally elicited in disputes over taste, a unified explanation of disagreement over taste appears to be misguided, and this is not the approach that I take here. Instead, I suggest that showing contextualism to be consistent with the linguistic data under consideration is a matter of isolating classes of conversations that elicit both intuitions and providing a source of the genuine disagreement intuition for that class of conversations. I thus advocate a *case-by-case* approach to explaining disagreement over taste. In accordance with this general strategy, I intend to motivate a contextualist approach to the semantics of predicates of personal taste by analyzing an example case that seems to be fairly representative of disputes involving attributions of tastiness. I first describe the case and contend that it represents a plausible scenario in which both the genuine disagreement and mutual correctness intuitions are elicited. Next, I locate the conflict; I claim that the disagreement is sensitive to features of the conversational context, and not just a matter of the
propositions semantically expressed. When the nature of the disagreement is understood as deriving from the pragmatic commitments of the speakers involved in the dispute, it becomes evident that it is consistent with the contextualist semantic account of the predicate ‘tasty’. While each party to the dispute can understand their assertions as expressing personal opinions (and as such expressing true propositions), they can also intend their utterances to have a further effect that generates the conflict. I then argue that, in virtue of meeting the five criteria, the contextualist proposal provides an adequate explanation of the linguistic data that the relativist points to as demanding a relativist semantic treatment. Having provided a plausible response the relativist challenge in this way, I suggest that the onus is back on the relativist to show that alternative classes of disagreement over taste exist in which both intuitions are elicited and no reasonable pragmatic account of the disagreement can be provided.

One methodological worry with the case-by-case approach is that it may allow for too much liberality in describing cases. So, in addition to describing disagreement over taste in a way that respects the five criteria developed in Ch. 2, some check should be put in place to ensure that the explanation does not depart from how actual disagreements involving taste develop. If the explanation provided meets the five criteria but predicts that disagreements over taste should progress in a way that is drastically different from how they actually do, then it cannot be accepted. By comparing the contextualist proposal regarding the linguistic significance of utterances involving predicates of personal taste to a plausible account of what is at stake in disagreements over taste developed by Andy Egan (forthcoming b), I argue that the contextualist proposal not only provides an adequate account of the linguistic data provided by discourses such as Chili,
but also provides a representation of disagreement over taste that accords well with how arguments of this sort generally progress. I thus conclude that an adequate explanation of the linguistic data can be provided without appealing to relativism.

4.4. The nature of recommendation

People frequently engage in the business of exchanging recommendations. We do so because relying on the counsel of others is a generally reliable way of acquiring important information. As finite creatures, we don’t always have the time or resources to examine directly and/or thoroughly everything that we may encounter prior to actually experiencing it, so we rely on the experience of others to inform our decisions regarding new encounters. Due to its communicative importance, recommendation is widely represented in linguistic practice. A large variety of linguistic constructions can be used to express the illocutionary force of recommendation. This can be done explicitly, as in “I hereby recommend…. ” But offering a recommendation can also be performed implicitly, as in “You should try the cake,” or “You would love this band I just heard.” Depending on the nature of the conversation in which these utterances occur, they can serve to convey the information that the speaker recommends the subject to which he refers.

There are a number of features of recommendations that distinguish utterances that convey them from mere statements of fact or weak commands. Crucially, recommendations depend upon analogy. The force of a recommendation comes from the presumption that certain relevant characteristics of the person offering the recommendation (henceforth, recommender) are shared by the person to whom the
recommendation is directed (recommendee). Additionally, recommendations generally involve citations of personal experience. The recommender presents as evidence his or her own experience with the subject in question. Of course, one may encourage another toward some action based on second hand information or on knowledge that is not acquired from personal experience, and these instances of testimony may appropriately be classified as recommendations. However, it is significant that recommendations are often elicited because the recommender is thought to have some privileged access to valuable information on the subject, and personal experience is an important species of such privileged access.

Recommendations also have the property of generating commitments. When an individual issues a recommendation, there is a sense in which she accepts responsibility for the decision made by the recommendee. As opposed to a mere statement of one’s personal experience, a recommendation carries the further implication that the same experience will be had by the recommendee. Should her experience not match that reported by the recommender, the recommendee could appropriately challenge the recommendation. At least, it is not odd for the recommendee to suggest that the recommender was wrong. Finally, recommendation can serve to substantiate certain contributions to a conversation. Just as it would be odd for an individual to spout a fact about, say, the average weight of adult hedgehogs during a discussion of the local baseball team, it is odd for someone to offer up a personal opinion without any sort of elicitation. A direct inquiry to the effect of, “What is your opinion regarding….” would

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30 The recommender may do more than just recount the experience in an unanalyzed fashion. For instance, she may speculate on the nature or source of the experience. However, that the experience is factual is the key aspect of the recommendation.
constitute a sufficient elicitation, but even in the absence of direct inquiry, the statement of a personal opinion may be appropriate to the conversation if it is offered with the force of recommendation.

4.5. An example case of disagreement over taste

It is my contention that many disagreements over taste can plausibly be represented as conflicts of recommendation. As a representative example, consider the following scenario. Tom, Sara, and Bill are out to eat at a restaurant. Bill knows that Sara and Tom frequent this particular establishment, so he asks of the pair, “What is good to eat here?” Sara responds, “The chili is tasty,” and Tom says, “No, the chili is not tasty.” Tom’s response suggests that he takes himself to be disagreeing with Sara. (Additionally, we could imagine Sara insisting that the chili is tasty and listing off certain characteristics that she takes to support her contention.) Despite this, we may also contend that, since matters of taste are matters of personal opinion, neither has said something false.

The contextualist account that I advocate maintains that Sara’s and Tom’s utterances do not express incompatible propositions, and thus can maintain that both express true propositions. However, their utterances do not, then, semantically conflict. Fortunately, there is a way for the contextualist to make sense of Sara’s and Tom’s disagreement and to do so in a way that respects the mutual correctness intuition. I suggest that in this example, the point of contention between Sara and Tom is one of conflicting recommendation. Food is one area in which reliance on the recommendations of others is prevalent. There are entire columns in many newspapers dedicated to
providing recommendations regarding choice in food. In the conversational context at
hand, it is reasonable to suggest that Sara’s and Tom’s responses to Bill have been
offered with the illocutionary force of recommendation. They intend that Bill will take
their utterances as evidence to help him make his choice of what to order. Indeed,
general Gricean principles are available to motivate the interpretation of Sara’s and
Tom’s utterances as recommendations. In particular, the maxim of Relation demands
that cooperative individuals make their contribution relevant to the talk exchange at hand.
Under the assumption that claims involving predicates of personal taste express personal
opinions, Sara’s response to Bill’s question hardly seems appropriate on its face.
However, Bill, presuming that Sara is cooperative, may reinterpret her to be offering a
relevant response to his question. Since Bill knows that Sara’s evidence is limited to her
own experience, she must believe that her experience is relevant to the discussion. This
would be the case if she had intended her response as a recommendation to Bill based on
the assumption that Bill’s experience would be similar to her own. Thus, the
characteristic of recommendations by which they substantiate the otherwise irrelevant
expression of a personal opinion helps to make sense of Sara’s intuitively appropriate
contribution to the conversation.

This analysis of the conversation also makes sense of our inclination to report that
this discourse involves both the mutual correctness and the genuine disagreement
intuitions. A recommendation generates a commitment on the part of the recommender
that the recommendee will have a similar experience to that reported. Consequently,
Sara’s and Tom’s recommendations commit them to conflicting responses on the part of
Bill. Sara and Tom have, in virtue of their utterances, a real point of contention.
Moreover, since on the contextualist proposal, Sara’s and Tom’s utterances semantically express their personal opinions, we are quite justified in suggesting that neither speaks falsely. While one of the two will ultimately be found to have offered an incorrect assessment of the situation, this is in virtue of certain pragmatic features of their utterances, not their semantic content.

This account of disagreement over taste explains the occurrence of apparently genuine faultless disagreement by creating a separation between the feature of the utterance that generates the mutual correctness intuition and that which generates the genuine disagreement intuition. Some such dissociation is required if the phenomenon is to be brought into agreement with an absolutist semantics. Despite this necessary separation, it should be pointed out that on the current proposal the two intuitions are not captured by strictly independent features of the conversation. As described, the disagreement derives from the recommendation implicature, and the recommendation implicature is generated by the assumption that Sara’s assertion of her personal opinion was not independently relevant to the conversational exchange up to that point. Thus, the disagreement intuition in a sense results from the same feature that motivates the mutual correctness intuition; namely, that assertions involving predicates of personal taste express personal opinions. Since it is the pre-theoretic intuition that matters of taste are matters of personal opinion that originally motivates the relativist proposal, this is a fairly happy result.31

31 Cf. Lasersohn (2005, p. 643), “Early in the course, when one introduces the idea of truth conditions, and of trying to formulate rules assigning truth conditions to sentences in a systematic way, students will frequently ask, ‘But what about sentences that aren’t about matters of fact, but are really just matters of opinion?’”
4.6. The adequacy of the contextualist proposal

The explanation of the linguistic data that I am proposing on behalf of the contextualist claims that the mutual correctness intuition arises from the understanding of predicates of personal taste as expressing personal opinions. Semantically, the content that ‘tasty’ contributes to a sentence containing it is sensitive to the standard of taste of the salient experiencer in the context of an utterance of that sentence. Thus, if Sara’s and Tom’s utterances are in relevantly different contexts, the mutual correctness intuition is captured by the fact that the propositions expressed by the two utterances can both be true. The explanation further claims that the genuine disagreement intuition is grounded in the conflicting pragmatic commitments generated by the utterances of the participants to the conversation. This interpretation of the linguistic data makes it possible for both of the intuitions involved to be captured by an absolutist approach to the semantics of predicates of personal taste, and I contend that it does so in a way that respects the five criteria on an adequate explanation of the data. Let’s recount those criteria.

Criterion #1: Theoretical neutrality
An adequate explanation of the data ought not to base its justification solely on theoretical considerations regarding the nature of truth.

Criterion #2: Mutual truth
An adequate explanation of the data ought to interpret the significance of the mutual correctness intuition as tracking the truth of the utterances involved.

Criterion #3: Semantic ignorance
An adequate explanation of the data ought not to rely on widespread confusion among participants engaged in disputes over taste.

Criterion #4: Linguistic disagreement
An adequate explanation of the data ought to represent the disagreement in question as a matter of the linguistic contributions to the discourse.
**Criterion #5: Intuition robustness**
An adequate explanation of the data ought to respect the significance of the intuitions. It must not just explain how the phenomenon can arise; it must explain why the intuitions are as robust as they are.

Criteria 1, 3, and 5 derive from methodological considerations concerning how to approach the project of explaining the data. The criterion of theoretical neutrality suggests that since the very question that the data is meant to help us resolve is the nature of propositional truth, an attempted explanation of the data ought not to presuppose a particular conception of propositions. Instead, by investigating the way in which certain features of language operate in linguistic communities, we may learn something about the nature of truth and how our language is structured. The success of this methodological approach requires that linguistic practice be able to provide insight into the nature of language. The criterion of semantic ignorance guards against explanations of the data that render the data worthless. If an explanation entails that language users systematically misunderstand the way their language works, then it simply denies that linguistic practice provides evidence at all. And the criterion of intuition robustness points out that while the data under consideration is represented by individual cases such as the *Chili* discourse, these cases represent a rather common linguistic phenomenon. It suggests that an adequate explanation of the data must take into account the fact that the intuitions to be explained are full-blooded. Criteria 2 and 4 derive from considerations of the individual intuitions specifically. They restrict the candidate explanations to those that represent the mutual correctness intuition as tracking the truth of the utterances involved and the genuine disagreement intuition as tracking conflict arising from the contributions of the utterances themselves.
The current contextualist proposal meets each of these criteria. First, while the current proposal supports a contextualist approach to the semantics of personal taste, its main theoretical commitment is to a rejection of the semantic conflict presumption. This rejection was seen to be independently motivated by the discussion in Ch. 3, and it is in principle consistent with both an absolutist and a relativist conception of propositions. The criterion of mutual truth is met by the contextualist claim that the content contributed by ‘tasty’ in a context is relative to the salient experiencer of that context, which is presumably a different individual in the contexts of Sara’s and Tom’s utterances. The contextualist approach to this class of predicates entails that the inclination to attribute correctness to each utterance in the discourse derives from the fact that the proposition semantically expressed by each utterance is indeed true.

As regards the criterion of semantic ignorance, while the contextualist cannot maintain that the disagreement is directly generated by the semantic contributions to the conversation, he need not suggest that the disagreement is due to a misunderstanding of the significance of the utterances involved. Indeed, by suggesting that the disagreement is a matter of conflicting pragmatic commitments that arise in part because of the common understanding that utterances involving predicates of personal taste express personal opinions, the contextualist explanation of the data suggests that the individuals involved in disagreements over taste are very much aware of the significance of their contributions to the conversation. In order to derive the recommendation implicature, Bill must recognize that, semantically, Sara has expressed her personal opinion.

The demand made by the linguistic disagreement criterion is met by recognizing that utterances can contribute much more to the conversation than just the propositions
they semantically express. The conflict that underwrites the disagreement in disputes over taste is a result of the pragmatic effects that the participants’ utterances generate in the conversational context. And finally, the proposal respects the robustness of the genuine disagreement intuition by appealing to general conversational maxims in citing the pragmatic effects of the utterances that generate the disagreement. The explanation of the disagreement does not rely on localized features of particular discourses but instead makes reference to the ways in which utterances can be used in conversations quite generally. By providing for a general method of calculating the pragmatic commitments that generate the disagreement in disputes over taste, this proposal respects the fact that the genuine disagreement intuition is a robust intuition that is elicited by a broad range of discourses. In light of these considerations, I conclude that an account of faultless disagreement that joins a contextualist semantics for predicates of personal taste with the potential of pragmatic conflict being generated by their use can adequately capture the linguistic data provided by discourses such as Chili.

4.7. Taste and presupposition of similarity

The criteria on an adequate explanation of the linguistic data provided by discourses such as Chili ensure that potential explanations respect the significance of the apparently contradictory and yet mutually true utterances made by the individuals engaged in those discourses. However, engaging in a disagreement is not just a matter of making conflicting utterances. In practice, disagreements progress from a point of initial conflict, through a series of conversational moves on the part of the disputants, and hopefully, to a point of resolution. In addition to meeting the criteria developed in Ch. 2,
an acceptable explanation of the data ought also to predict that disagreements over taste evolve in a way that they actually do in practice. In recent work, Andy Egan (forthcoming b) points out that while disagreements over attributions of tastiness are very much like disagreements in other realms of discourse, they are often aberrant in certain specifiable ways. The current proposal, in which disagreement over matters of taste is generated by certain pragmatic commitments of the disputants, provides a plausible linguistic basis for the analysis given by Egan of what is at stake in these disputes.

Egan starts with the common sense observation that genuine disagreement between disputants is a matter of there being certain moves made in the conversation that it is not possible for both parties to accept. A disagreement is then resolved when one party convinces the other to give up their stance and accept the other. For instance, when I claim that the 8th president of the United States was William Henry Harrison and you contend that it was Martin Van Buren, we may engage in a dispute by offering various reasons for why we hold the position that we do with the intent to get the other to adopt that position. Essentially, I want you to attribute the property of being the 8th U.S. president to Harrison, and you want me to attribute the same property to Van Buren. Our conflict is over the proper attribution of the property being the 8th U.S. president; given the positions we maintain, it is not possible for either of us to rationally accept both. If all goes well, our dispute will be resolved when you get me to attribute the property to its rightful owner.

While dispute is a quite common phenomenon, not all disputes are worth undertaking. Some fail to be genuine disagreements because there is no point of actual conflict. An example of this sort of dispute is one in which you object to my contention
that I am hungry with the statement, “I’m not hungry at all.” In this pseudo-disagreement, I maintain that the property of being hungry is appropriately attributed to me, and you maintain that it is not properly attributed to you. But there is no conflict between our stances because there is nothing that prevents each of us from accepting both claims and moving on. Our disagreement is defective due to a lack of actual conflict.

Yet, even when there is genuine conflict, a disagreement can still be defective if it is simply not worthwhile. Disagreements may be defective due to unworthiness in a number of ways. Some disagreements just aren’t very important, so time spent engaged in them is time that could have been put to better use. Alternatively, certain relevant data for deciding the dispute may not be available to the disputants, so that maintaining the disagreement won’t really accomplish anything. For instance, engaging in a dispute over the number of fleas on Caesar’s body when he crossed the Rubicon is of little value because there is no means available to us of resolving the dispute. But sometimes, we may think that the unworthiness goes even deeper. It might seem that for some disagreements the relevant information is not even available in principle. In certain domains, the idea that a debate could be rationally settled in favor of either side is doubtful. Many disagreements over taste may be thought to suffer from this third type of unworthiness. Egan describes our tendency to question the worthiness of disputes over taste, such as whether broccoli or Brussels sprouts taste better, in the following way.

There’s a pretty strong inclination to say that the project of resolving this dispute one way or the other, and establishing a common view about which of our assertions is the one to accept, is a bad one to go in for not just because the facts about who’s really got the right view about broccoli and Brussels sprouts are hard to figure out or not very important, but because both parties have already got the right view about the relative tastiness of those vegetables for them to have.32

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32 Egan (forthcoming b, p. 14). This quote is drawn from a draft of this work dated May 30, 2007.
We are prone to suggest that individuals engaged in disagreements over taste may be fighting an unworthy battle because often times there is no way, even in principle, that it could be rationally resolved. The task then is to determine the nature of the conflict in disagreements over taste such that we can make sense of their tendency to this sort of defectiveness. Egan suggests that we can pull this out by examining what an individual commits herself to when she sincerely makes an attribution of tastiness. When an individual sincerely comments on the aesthetic qualities of some subject, she reveals a personal conviction regarding the reaction she is disposed to have to that subject. Whatever else an assertion regarding the tastiness of some food may do, it seems to reveal a particular self-attribution that the individual is willing to make. If an individual maintains that a particular food is tasty, then she self-attributes the property of being gustatorily disposed to enjoy that food. This commitment to a particular self-attribution seems to be a central feature of assertions of tastiness. In light of this, Egan suggests that we view disagreements over taste as involving competing attempts on the parts of the disputants to convince the other to self-attribute a certain dispositional property. In the case of the dispute between Sara and Tom, this proposal suggests that Sara is pushing Tom to self-attribute the property of being gustatorily disposed to enjoy the chili whereas Tom is pushing Sara to self-attribute the property of being gustatorily disposed to dislike the chili. This represents a point of genuine conflict because to accept both stances would require an individual to self-attribute two incompatible properties.

In order to capture the fact that disputes of this sort often become defective in the special way that they do, Egan has us recognize two important aspects of how people approach matters of taste. First, individuals have privileged access to their own
dispositional properties. Regarding matters of taste, I am in a better position than anyone to recognize my tendencies to respond in certain ways to certain foods. However, while we do have privileged access to our own taste experiences, we do not want to suggest that our judgments on the matter are infallible. For instance, I may sincerely assert, “Orange juice is not tasty,” on the basis of a negative experience with a sample of it, but if someone were to remind me that I had just brushed my teeth and that the conditions may not have been appropriate to make that judgment, I would consider retracting my claim. Second, while we only have access to our own taste experiences, we do not think that they are in any way unique. We generally believe that our evaluations of tastiness will be shared by most other members of the communities to which we belong. It seems that in general, individuals who enter discussions regarding taste assume a certain amount of similarity regarding their culinary relationship to their conversational partners.

When individuals discuss matters of taste, they tend to bring two presuppositions to the table. Let’s call these the fallibility presupposition and the similarity presupposition.

**Fallibility**
Individuals can make faulty self-attributions of certain of their properties. Challenges from others can provide reason to reconsider a particular self-attribution that an individual sincerely makes.

**Similarity**
The quality of our own taste experiences is generally mirrored by the experiences of others in our peer group. Tastiness assessments, while personal, are not unique to the individual assessor.

The presence of these presuppositions explains why disputes over taste tend to progress as they do. Our willingness to engage in such disputes is explained by the fact that we generally think that our own taste evaluations extend to those of the members of the
community with which we interact. So, when our attributions are directly challenged, we may be inclined to question the accuracy of the challenger’s attribution. Since self-attributions are fallible, we may think that the challenger has just missed an important aspect of the taste experience. One’s contributions to the dispute may then be attempts to get the challenger to recognize a dispositional property that they possess but have somehow overlooked (e.g., “Did you sense the tarragon?” “Maybe you should cleanse your palette.”).

The defectiveness of many disputes over taste is also explained. While in many instances we may get confirmation from our conversational partners that our presupposition of similarity is well grounded, the fact is that we do differ from members of our community in certain regards, including some of our gustatory dispositions, and sometimes our disputes serve to reveal that this is the case. When the presupposition of similarity fails for a particular food item, resolving the dispute would result in one individual self-attributing a property that he simply does not have. Thus, such disputes are not worth continuing. When we sense that a dispute over taste is defective, this is because we sense that the individuals are not relevantly similar regarding the case at hand.

Egan’s proposal offers a plausible explanation of what is at stake in disputes involving matters of taste, and the contextualist account offered here explains how these disputes are represented linguistically. The contextualist maintains that the content contributed by ‘tasty’ is relativized to the taste standards of some individual. More often than not, the relevant standard is that of the individual making the assertion. This captures directly the sense in which assertions of tastiness indicate a self-attribution of a
dispositional property. In virtue of the semantic content of her utterance, Sara is committed to the chili being tasty to her. Additionally, offering a recommendation is one of the conversational moves that can be made with an utterance involving an assertion of tastiness. Since recommendations depend for their force on a presumption of similarity between the recommender and the recommendee, the appeal to this pragmatic effect provides a link between our linguistic and our behavioral practices involving matters of taste.

*Prima facie,* it seems that a contextualist account of the semantics of predicates of personal taste is very well suited to make sense of their behavior in disagreements over taste. However, Egan considers various proposals for an appropriate semantics for taste predicates, and suggests that contextualism fails to make sense of when these arguments become defective (forthcoming b, §5). As we saw, when disagreements over taste become defective, it is due to a failure of worthiness. This is because disagreements over taste are viable as long as the presupposition of similarity survives. When it is discovered that this presupposition fails, it is no longer worthwhile to carry on the dispute because there is no way of rationally resolving it. Instead, the parties to the dispute should cease maintaining their stances and no longer attempt to convince the other to self-attribute the relevant property.

It may appear, though, that a contextualist semantics doesn’t predict this outcome. Contextualism claims that the propositions that individuals semantically express with their assertions regarding tastiness are sensitive to features of the context in which they occur. Thus, it seems to predict that the discovery that the presupposition of similarity fails is correlated with the discovery that individuals in defective disputes over taste are
making their utterances from relevantly different contexts. And when the parties
discover that they have been expressing different propositions, it is the conflict that is
lost. Hence, each party could continue to maintain their stance while simultaneously
accepting the other’s. For example, in a dispute between individuals A and B, A could
accept that B need not self-attribute the property of being disposed to enjoy the food item
of interest relative to B’s context, and maintain that B ought to self-attribute the property
relative to A’s context. Thus, the dispute, if it remains viable at all, becomes a dispute
over which context is applicable to the conversation, and this seems to be a different
dispute entirely. Instead of a failure of worthiness in certain disagreements over taste,
contextualism predicts a failure of conflict.

If this was the interpretation that the contextualist was forced to provide, it would
fail to meet the condition of accurately representing the way in which disagreements over
taste progress. As we have seen, though, this is not the only explanation of the
disagreement available to the contextualist. Instead of maintaining that the conflict
between the parties to the dispute tracks their having semantically expressed
incompatible propositions, the contextualist can maintain that the disagreement is
generated by pragmatic features of their utterances. In the particular case at hand, despite
expressing personal opinions regarding the chili, Sara’s and Tom’s utterances are in
conflict due to their pragmatic role in the conversation as recommendations. As
recommendations, their utterances encourage the other participants in the conversation to
self-attribute different, incompatible properties. In effect, the failure of the
presupposition of similarity need not track the failure of expressing incompatible
propositions. Instead, it can be seen as tracking the failure of the similarity presumption
that grounds the recommendation. While one of the recommendations may be found to be wrong because the recommender and recommendee do not share an important similarity, it does not cease to be a recommendation. Because of their force as recommendations, the conversational moves made by the disputants cannot be simultaneously accepted. So, when disagreements involving conflicting recommendations become defective, it is not due to a loss of conflict. It is do to the fact that it is not worthwhile for the individuals to push recommendations on those to which they are relevantly dissimilar. Hence, the contextualist can offer an account that is consistent with Egan’s account of how disagreement over taste generally progresses.

In order to motivate the contextualist proposal, I have provided an account of a representative case of disagreement over taste, in which the dispute can be interpreted as a matter of conflicting recommendations. Egan’s proposal helps to explain why such an account makes sense. The presupposition of similarity represents a common view of how gustatory dispositions are distributed among members of the communities we interact with. It is thus to be expected that language users would develop certain means of exploiting this presupposition when communicating about taste. The issuing of a recommendation is an important way of communicating valuable information, and its prominence in discussions involving taste is a direct result of the fact that individuals generally take the quality of their taste experiences to be mirrored in the taste experiences of others. Thus, the contextualist can reference the pragmatic commitments generated by utterances in conversation to offer a plausible explanation of the conflict involved in a significant class of disagreements over taste.
The contextualist is able to meet the relativist’s challenge by showing that both the genuine disagreement intuition and the mutual correctness intuition can be adequately captured without countenancing relativistic propositions. While I have only shown that the contextualist appeal to pragmatic conflict is viable in the case of conversations that involve a recommendation implicature, recognition of the presupposition of similarity that individuals bring to their discussions regarding matters of taste provides the ground for extending this approach to further classes of such disagreements as they are presented. Individuals approach discussions regarding taste with a general mindset that their assessments of the tastiness of foods will be more or less shared by those they are conversing with. This presupposition may well influence what they use their assertions to accomplish in the conversational context. While recommendation is one illocutionary act that exploits this presupposition, various other pragmatic effects of utterances involving attributions of tastiness may do so as well.

4.8. General considerations on faultless disagreement

It seems to me that the linguistic data that the relativist appeals to as evidence of truly faultless disagreement can be adequately captured in a way that is consistent with an absolutist conception of propositions. If I am right, then a couple conclusions of a general sort present themselves. First, relativists will have to appeal to different considerations to motivate their account of propositions. While countenancing genuinely faultless disagreement requires a distinctly relativist approach to the nature of

33 Additional arguments in favor of relativistic treatment of certain expressions have been offered by Egan et al. (2005), Egan (2007), Lasersohn (forthcoming), and MacFarlane (2005b, forthcoming). These arguments deserve further consideration. Unfortunately, I am not able to undertake that project here.
propositions, it is not clear that the data provided by relativists forces the absolutist to accept the reality of genuinely faultless disagreement. This in turn suggests that the pre-theoretic intuitions that Kölbl (2003) points to do not have any greater independent motivation than the intuition that genuine disagreement must involve some mistake on the part of at least one member of the dispute. And given the semantically and metaphysically radical thesis that the relativist maintains, the balance of evidence seems to fall in favor of the absolutist approach.

Additionally, while I haven’t considered it here, there is reason to think that many of the considerations discussed for taking the linguistic data of faultless disagreement to be consistent with an absolutist semantics will generalize to other realms of discourse that purportedly allow for faultless disagreement, such as aesthetic and moral value and knowledge attributions. Individuals have certain interests in engaging in conversation, and these interests will differ depending on the subject matter of the conversation. Regarding matters of taste, we have a general interest in sharing our personal experiences with others. Regarding attributions of knowledge, we may have interests in assessing an individual’s responsibility for certain actions or in discovering who would be a good source for inquiring about some fact. While many of these interests will find a place in the semantic interpretation of the sentences uttered in the conversation, it is not incumbent on semantic theory to represent all interests an individual may have in presenting an utterance in conversation. It seems to me that as a general rule, when we get the sense that a particular conversation involves a disagreement, we should be willing

34 Cf. Cappelen and Lepore (2007). Cappelen and Lepore argue that the fact that individuals often look for a location when they interpret the utterance of sentences such as “It’s raining”, this is not due to the semantics of the expression ‘rain’ but to contingent facts about our interests in the topic of rain.
to look beyond the semantic content of the utterances involved and examine the particular pragmatic interests that individuals engaged in conversations over that subject matter may have. Since disagreement arising from conflicting pragmatic commitments is a general linguistic phenomenon, the project of looking to the pragmatic effects of utterances in conversation to ground apparent disagreement is a viable one for explaining disputes in all realms of discourse.
5. Contextualism for Predicates of Personal Taste

5.1. Taste and experience

In the previous chapter, I argued that the linguistic evidence for faultless disagreement is compatible with a contextualist semantics for the predicates of personal taste (henceforth, PPTs). In this chapter, I discuss some independent reason for taking PPTs to be context sensitive. As a semantic approach, contextualism can take many forms; the key tenet is that the content that an expression contributes to a sentence differs based on the context in which it occurs. Contextualist proposals for a set of expressions are individuated based on what sorts of contextual variation they take to result in content variation.

Intuitively, PPTs are evaluative terms whose proper application depends on a standard against which subjects are judged. Yet, the apparent variability of the truth value of sentences containing PPTs suggests that no single standard is universally applicable in all instances of their use. Instead, the standard varies with respect to different applications of the term. Moreover, with regard to personal taste, standards appear to be individuated quite finely. The standard of tastiness that I apply in a particular attribution may be different from the one that you apply in similar attributions. The personal nature of matters of taste suggests that the appropriate standard for a particular use of a PPT is tied to an individual whose experience with the subject is relevant for that particular use.\textsuperscript{35} The version of contextualism that I maintain suggests

\textsuperscript{35} A single individual may also apply different standards in her different uses of a PPT. This fact, in conjunction with the arguments that follow may suggest that PPTs have an argument slot for standards in addition to individuals. While this does not change the overall structure of my argument, it does significantly complicate the presentation. For simplicity, I interpret the content of PPTs as being contextually sensitive only to the specification of a salient experiencer.
that changes in the relevant *experiencer* between contexts result in a corresponding change in the content contributed by a PPT in those contexts.

Clearly, the explicit syntactic structure of many grammatical sentences involving PPTs does not make evident the importance of an experiencer. Sentence (1) is a common sentence of this type.

(1) Mushrooms are tasty.

The contextualist regarding PPTs must claim that the semantic structure of PPTs is not explicitly revealed (in all cases) by the surface structure of sentences involving them. Instead, the contextualist claims that the intuitive considerations regarding the use of PPTs can be captured semantically by maintaining that (in addition to an argument slot ranging over objects) the semantic structure of expressions such as ‘tasty’ includes an (often unarticulated) argument position whose value ranges over individuals. Thus, the predicate ‘tasty’ *selects for* two complement phrases. The first complement is restricted to phrases that incorporate the thematic role of *subject*; these include, for example, ‘this chili’, ‘mushrooms’, and ‘tofu’. The second complement is restricted to those that incorporate the thematic role of *experiencer*; for example, ‘to me’, ‘for John’, ‘to Suzy’.

The distinctly contextualist claim is that when the surface structure of a sentence containing a PPT does not explicitly represent this second argument slot, its value is determined implicitly by context. What this means is that it is part of the standing meaning of predicates such as ‘tasty’ that they select for a particular individual that is the relevant evaluator of the subject to which the predicate is applied. Consequently, the

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36 Alternatively, the contextualist maintains that certain phrases that incorporate the thematic roles of subject and experiencer are *L-marked* by PPTs. The notion of L-marking is introduced by Chomsky (1986). Much of my discussion regarding argument structure and the incorporation of thematic roles is based on Ludlow (2005).
content that ‘tasty’ contributes to a sentence is relative to the evaluative standard that is
used by that individual in judging the gustatory quality of the subject to which it is
applied. Sometimes this individual will be explicitly specified in the surface structure of
the sentence, but often the context within which the sentence occurs will be the
determining factor.

5.2. Arguments and adjuncts

The argument structure of a predicate is often revealed by the number and type of
phrases that accompany it in grammatical sentences. For instance, the verb *to give* has a
three place argument structure, and the appropriate values for each argument slot are
restricted to those that fill certain roles. Consider a sentence like (2).

(2) John gave the flower to Suzy.

In (2), the argument positions selected for by ‘gave’ are filled respectively by the
semantic contributions made by the phrases ‘John’, ‘the flower’, and ‘to Suzy’. The
sentence is grammatical because each of those phrases incorporates a specific thematic
role that is appropriate for the respective argument slot. ‘John’ incorporates the thematic
role of *agent*, ‘the flower’ incorporates the role of *subject*, and ‘to Suzy’ incorporates the
role of *goal*. In contrast, (3) is not grammatical because the phrases accompanying
‘gave’ do not incorporate the appropriate thematic roles.

(3) *Happiness gave running in the park.

The suggestion made by the contextualist regarding PPTs is that despite apparent
surface structure, *tasty* has a two place argument structure that selects for values that
incorporate the thematic roles of subject and experiencer. According to the contextualist, (4) is an example of a well-formed sentence involving ‘tasty’.

(4) This chili is tasty to John.

While it may not be the most common form that sentences involving ‘tasty’ take, (4) appears to be grammatical. However, sentences such as (1), which do not explicitly represent this structure, are also grammatical. The current proposal is that the semantic structure of sentences involving PPTs is complete only upon specification of a value for the role of experiencer and that sentences that do not explicitly represent that structure have the value set implicitly by context. Thus, the contextualist maintains that certain arguments can be incorporated by elements of the context in which a sentence occurs as well as by explicit complement phrases. There is some precedent for positing the presence of argument slots in the semantic structure of predicates that go unarticulated in the surface structure of grammatical sentences. For instance, to eat arguably selects for an object (what has been eaten). However, since (5) is a grammatical sentence, the specification of the object must sometimes occur only implicitly.

(5) John ate.

The intuitive considerations mentioned above regarding the variability of the appropriate standard in matters of taste lend some credence to the suggestion that PPTs select for an experiencer even if a value for this argument is often unarticulated. Additionally, the fact that sentences such as (4) are grammatical gives further plausibility to this suggestion. In at least some instances, PPTs are accompanied by phrases that incorporate the thematic role of experiencer. However, not all phrases that can accompany predicates in grammatical sentences represent a feature of the argument
structure of those predicates. For instance, (6) may be grammatical, but this need not lead us to suggest that the argument structure of *to eat* includes a slot for the thematic role of location.

(6) John ate the sandwich in the park.

While all eatings necessarily take place somewhere, this fact does not seem to be semantically relevant. Instead, the phrase ‘in the park’ is more plausibly characterized as a mere *adjunct* in sentences involving the act of eating. Adjuncts are phrases that can form parts of grammatical sentences but do not represent aspects of the core semantic structure of the predicates involved.

5.3. *Testing for argument structure*

Ludlow (2005) presents a number of tests for determining whether a phrasal structure that accompanies a predicate in grammatical sentences represents an aspect of the argument structure of that predicate or is more plausibly an adjunct. The performance of ‘tasty’ on three such tests suggests that the experiencer role represents an aspect of the argument structure of this predicate.

The first test is known as the *iteration test*. If a phrase represents the value of an argument slot selected for by a verb, then its presence in the sentence serves to fill that argument slot. Once that argument slot is filled, further phrases representing a value for that slot are precluded from inclusion in a grammatical sentence. If, however, a phrase represents a mere adjunct, then additional phrases that incorporate the same role could also plausibly be appended to the sentence without sacrificing grammaticality. One test
for argument status, then, is whether phrases incorporating the same thematic role can be
iterated in a grammatical sentence. For example, (7) is ungrammatical.

(7) *John cut the bread with a knife, with a spoon, with his hand.

If it is to be understood as making sense at all, it must be along the lines of (7a) in which
three separate cuttings are conjoined in one report.

(7a) John cut the bread with a knife, and with a spoon, and with his hand.

This failure of iteration suggests that the argument structure of ‘cut’ includes a slot for
phrases incorporating the role of instrument. Once that slot is filled, further phrases
incorporating the same role must be interpreted as referring to separate instances of the
action. In contrast, the iterated phrases in (8) can be interpreted as increasingly narrowly
specifying the location of the cutting.

(8) John cut the bread in the house, in the kitchen, in the corner.

This suggests that the thematic role of location is not an aspect of the argument structure
of ‘cut’ because multiple phrases incorporating that role can be appended without loss of
grammaticality (or without being forced to interpret the sentence as reporting on multiple
events). In the case of ‘tasty’, the experiencer role seems to resist iteration. Consider a
sentence like (9).

(9) *This burger is tasty to me, to Suzy, to Bill.

At best, this sentence seems only to have the conjunction reading in which the burger
qualifies as tasty under a separate specification of each of the experiencers mentioned.
The failure of grammatical iteration of phrases incorporating the experiencer role for
sentences involving ‘tasty’ suggests that such phrases represent a feature of the argument
structure of this predicate.
An additional test for whether a phrase accompanying a predicate represents an argument is the incorporation test. This test suggests that if a predicate formed from incorporating the phrase into the original predicate fails to allow for modification by phrases of the same sort, then the relevant thematic role represents an argument of the original verb. For example, in (10) we can incorporate the instrument phrase into the predicate to create the predicate cut-the-bread-with-a-knife.

(10) John cut the bread with a knife.

When we do this, we find that this new predicate does not take phrases representing the instrument role. (11) is ungrammatical.

(11) *John cut-the-bread-with-a-knife with a fork.

However, appending a locative to the modified predicate, as in (11a), results in a grammatical sentence.

(11a) John cut-the-bread-with-a-knife in the kitchen.

This suggests that the original predicate ‘cut’ has a slot for an instrument as part of its argument structure. The incorporation test also rules in favor of the claim that the experiencer role is an aspect of the argument structure of the predicate ‘tasty’. Consider a sentence like (12).

(12) *Chocolate is tasty-to-John to Mary.

This sentence is difficult to make sense of at all. We might interpret ‘to Mary’ as relating Mary’s thoughts on the subject as in (12a).

(12a) As far as Mary knows, chocolate is tasty-to-John.

Even if this interpretation is reasonable, the phrase ‘to Mary’ no longer incorporates the thematic role of experiencer.
The final test that I will consider is the *binding test*. The contextualist proposal assumed here suggests that there is a variable slot within the argument structure of PPTs whose value is determined by context (unless it is explicitly syntactically incorporated). If this variable is actually a part of the argument structure of these predicates, then we should be able to quantify over it. The binding test for argument structure suggests that predicates that select for specific thematic roles will allow for quantification over that role. For example, ‘local’ is often taken to be a context sensitive expression in that what things qualify as local depends on their proximity to some contextually salient location. Different utterances of (13) will have different truth values depending on what bars count as local in the context of each utterance.

(13) Frank went to a local bar.

The apparent context sensitivity of sentences containing ‘local’ suggests that the argument structure for ‘local’ includes a variable slot for a location. And this suggestion is confirmed by the fact that this location can apparently be quantified over. This is made evident by the grammaticality of sentences such as (14), which has a reading along the lines of (14a). On this reading, for each person quantified over, a different value is specified for the location variable.

(14) Everybody went to a local bar.

(14a) Every person \(x\) is such that \(x\) went to a bar that is local to \(x\).

The case seems to be parallel for ‘tasty’. (15) can plausibly be understood as having (15a) as its content.
(15) Chocolate is tasty for everybody.

(15a) Every person $x$ is such that chocolate is tasty to $x$.\(^{37}\)

5.4. *Contextual determination of the experiencer*

The preceding tests provide support for the claim that the argument structure for predicates such as ‘tasty’ includes a slot for the thematic role of experiencer. Since it is often the case that this role goes unspecified in the surface structure of sentences involving PPTs, the assignment of a value to the implicit argument is a duty often relegated to context. Stating precisely how the context performs this duty requires a broader theory of the nature of context, which is not something that I am able to give. But there are a couple of things that can be said about the experiencer role and context. The criterion of *Mutual Truth* developed in Ch. 3 indicates that individuals generally take others’ assertions regarding tastiness to be something to which they have some sort of privileged access. This suggests that in general, the relevant experiencer for an utterance of a sentence involving personal taste is the *speaker* of that sentence. In light of this, we may suggest that predicates of personal taste are relatively pure indexicals (similar to ‘I’) in that their standing meaning is a function from a context to the taste standards of the speaker of that context. However, while ‘I’ never refers to anyone other than the speaker, there appear to be a number of cases in which the source of the standard against which the subject is evaluated is shifted away from the speaker. Consider the following two scenarios.

\(^{37}\) This interpretation bears a superficial resemblance to the formulation of the objective reading of ‘tasty’ that was postulated by the advocate of *Faultless or Disagreement* in Ch. 3. However, it should be kept in mind that success on the binding test does not entail that there is a distinct sense of ‘tasty’ such that the content it contributes to a sentence in context is a universal quantification over individuals.
Baby Food
A mother is struggling mightily to get her young child to eat his food. After multiple attempts to get him to “open the hangar,” she states, “Come on now, it’s tasty.”

Vulture
A family is driving down a country road, and they pass a vulture feasting on an unfortunate animal. The child in the back seat complains of the sight, to which the father responds, “Well, obviously rotting flesh is tasty.”

The intuitive response to Baby Food is that the mother’s sincere assertion does not commit her to any personal view regarding the taste of the food. I think we would claim that the sentence she utters could be true even if she were to find the food repulsive. This suggests that the contribution of ‘tasty’ in this utterance is not her own taste standard, but instead, the taste standard of the child. (If the child were also to find the food repulsive, I am inclined to suggest that the mother’s assertion would be false.) If this is right, then PPTs are not pure indexicals. Instead, saliency of a particular individual seems to play a role in determining the relevant experiencer of the context. In the example at hand, the context makes salient the addressee of the mother’s statement as the relevant experiencer.

Regarding Vulture, I am also hesitant to suggest that the father’s statement is only true if he finds rotting flesh tasty. Instead, the content of his utterance seems to be that rotting flesh is tasty for the vulture. Yet, it does not seem appropriate to suggest that the father is commenting specifically on the taste standards of that particular vulture but on vulture taste generally. This in turn suggests that context must also be able to assign classes of individuals to the experiencer role for particular utterances involving PPTs. Yet, as we saw in Ch. 2 regarding the semantic theories offered by Glanzberg and the advocate of Faultless or Disagreement, accounting for contextual determination of a class of individuals to set the content of PPTs leads to difficult complications.
I don’t think, however, that we are forced into establishing a plausible way for context to determine a class of individuals to fill the experiencer role. Instead, two possibilities are open to the contextualist who maintains that the argument slot for experiencer is filled by individuals. The first is that the relevant experiencer is the particular vulture that is the inspiration for the father’s statement. The second is that the relevant experiencer is some paradigm vulture. In many cases, the context will make salient some particular individual whose taste standards are clearly relevant. However, in other cases in which the relevant experiencer is shifted from the speaker of the context, no particular individual will be clearly relevant. I suggest that in these cases, the salient experiencer is some paradigm representative of a group of interest. Each of these options posits an individual to fill the experiencer role, and the sentence is true just in case the subject food meets the taste standards of that individual. The generalized reading of these sentences, in which we tend to think that the statement is a comment on the group as a whole can then be captured by appealing to the presupposition of similarity that was mentioned in the last chapter as a key element of language speakers’ approach to matters of taste. While the semantics of sentences involving taste only make reference to individual standards of taste, utterances involving taste can carry further information regarding a class of individuals based on the practical fact that tastes tend to be shared by individuals that share other features in common (such as vulturehood). Thus, the contextualist can again appeal to pragmatic effects of utterances to capture some intuitions regarding the use of PPTs.

Non-standard cases such as Baby Food and Vulture seem to suggest that PPTs are not pure indexicals. If this is the case, then perhaps minimal complications to the way in
which context determines their content such as appealing to the saliency of some individual can be provided. However, it should be pointed out that intuitions in these cases are not incredibly clear, and perhaps these cases can be given pragmatic explanations. For both scenarios, it is difficult to imagine cases in which the relevant sentences would be *sincerely* asserted. More often than not, these utterances would be made either deceptively (in the case of the mother) or sarcastically (in the case of the father). To take the sarcastic utterance as an example, we would be inclined to suggest that the speaker has explicitly said something false in an attempt to flout the maxim of quality and generate the implicature that, say, rotting flesh is very far from being tasty. These sarcastic uses of PPTs are also amenable to the contextualist approach. Presumably, if the sarcasm is pulled off, there will be a standard of taste salient in the context for which the food item of interest does not qualify as tasty (by a wide margin). In the vulture example, the salient taste standard is that of the child in the car. The inclination to suggest that the assertion made is false (which generates the implicature) is then explained by the fact that context presents the child in the car as the relevant experiencer.

5.5. *Taste and objectivity*

Contextualism is particularly well positioned to capture many of the apparent subjective uses of PPTs. However, there are also uses of PPTs that seem to demand more objective readings. At first glance, the version of contextualism presented here is not well positioned to capture this behavior of PPTs. I think, however, that the available objectivist arguments do not threaten to undermine the viability of contextualism to
capture the semantic significance of PPTs. I will now address some of these objectivist concerns.

It can appear at times that individuals tend to use predicates such as ‘tasty’ in such a way that they have a quite impersonal application. This fact is a driving force behind the Faultless or Disagreement interpretation of the linguistic evidence discussed in Ch. 2. The view of PPTs that this account of the phenomenon argues for is one in which there is a subjective sense of predicates such as ‘tasty’ that requires one semantic interpretation and there is an objective sense that requires another interpretation. The current proposal does not capture the objective sense without modification. However, this appeal to the objectivity of certain uses of taste should not be seen as detrimental to the contextualist position. We should keep in mind that the objective reading here considered was posited as an explanation of the phenomenon of disagreement over taste. We are not given an independent justification of the need to countenance an objective sense of PPTs beyond its role in explaining the fact that individuals can sometimes engage in genuine disagreements over the gustatory quality of foods. Since an independent explanation of the linguistic data in which the disagreement arises from the pragmatic commitments of the disputants (and which arguably does a better job of accounting for disagreement over taste) is available to the contextualist, this motivation for providing for an objective reading of PPTs is abated. Beyond this, the intuitive impersonality of certain uses of PPTs can be captured in a way that is consistent with the current contextualist proposal by appealing to the presupposition of similarity that accompanies most individuals’ understanding of the distribution of taste standards in a particular community. Instead of
positing an extra semantic sense, this objectivist worry can be dissolved by giving a pragmatic explanation.

Additionally, some motivation for the appeal of the objectivist reading of PPTs may be due to a conflation of attributions of *taste* and attributions of *tastiness*. While it is not uncontroversial, it is quite likely that the taste that a particular food item has is an objective matter dependent on some sort of relation between the chemical structure of the food and receptors in the taster’s body.\(^{38}\) This relation is no doubt a very complicated one and one that is sensitive to a number of features of the circumstance in which the tasting occurs. The delicate nature of the relationship between the taste of a food item and the environment surrounding the tasting can give taste a feel of subjectivity. Despite this, many people have the sense that taste is something that is in some way independent of the taster. We take it that reports of certain foods having certain tastes are subject to verification by objective means, and that this is because the taste is somehow *in* the food. A connoisseur does *not* impart subtle flavors into the food she examines, but *discovers* them amongst the more obvious ones. This view of taste as being an objective manner is reflected in many of the ways that we approach food. We infer inductively from past experiences with a food type to future ones, and we often say things like, “I don’t care for the taste of broccoli,” which suggests an acceptance of broccoli’s having a particular taste independent of us.

Our use of predicates such as ‘taste’ (as in ‘x tastes of φ’) seems to imply that they are semantically invariant. The invariance of these predicates, however, does not necessarily carry over to *evaluative* predicates such as ‘tasty’. While we may take the

\(^{38}\) Smith (2007) discusses the cases for and against objectivity regarding taste in the particular setting of wine tasting.
taste that a food has to be an inherent, objective feature, we may yet be less inclined to
suppose that the taste a food possesses will be equally appreciated by everyone.
Attributions of tastes can be semantically invariant without attributions of tastiness being
so. And intuitions regarding the use of PPTs, such as the mutual correctness intuition,
provide strong evidence for the claim that matters of tastiness are experiencer subjective.

It is not clear that intuitive considerations regarding the impersonal uses of PPTs
demand that they be given an objective sense. However, PPTs do behave in certain ways
that encourage an invariantist semantic interpretation. One example of this involves
complex sentences from which an occurrence of a PPT in a secondary clause can be
grammatically omitted. Consider the following example.

Charles: “Margaret thinks it’s tasty, but it’s not.”
Intuitively, Charles has made two claims. He has claimed that Margaret holds a
particular belief, and he has further claimed that her belief is false. This interpretation of
his assertion poses a problem for a contextualist semantics for ‘tasty’. Contextualism
claims that the content contributed by the predicate ‘tasty’ is relativized to the taste
standards of some individual salient in the context. In the current example, there are two
salient possibilities for the identity of this individual – Charles and Margaret. Neither is
promising. If the occurrence of ‘tasty’ is indexed to Charles, then the first clause
apparently attributes to Margaret a belief about his gustatory inclinations, which is not at
all plausible. Alternatively, if ‘tasty’ is indexed to Margaret, then the second clause
apparently denies Margaret’s belief about her own gustatory inclinations, and I don’t
imagine Charles would be so presumptuous. A third alternative is that the context shifts
mid-sentence and that while Margaret is the relevant experiencer for the first clause,
Charles is for the second. On this interpretation, Charles’ assertion can be given a more plausible sense. Charles attributes to Margaret the belief that the indicated food item is tasty to Margaret and then denies that the indicated food item is tasty to Charles.

However, this alternative seems to be ruled out by the fact that the second occurrence of ‘tasty’ is elided. Charles is confident that his first mention of ‘tasty’ will carry over into the second clause of his utterance. Based on the grammaticality of the sentence, we seem forced into maintaining that a univocal content for ‘tasty’ is pertinent in both clauses.

Alternatively, if ‘tasty’ is viewed as invariant, then the grammaticality of Charles’ utterance is easily explained. It is directly parallel to the sentence “Margaret thinks that pigs fly, but they don’t.” Charles is attributing a belief to Margaret that some object possesses the property of being tasty and then denies the truth of that belief, presumably because he believes that the object does not possess that property.

The failure of the contextualist proposal is tied to the grammaticality of omitting the second occurrence of ‘tasty’. This is a significant challenge to contextualism due to the fact that omission of expressions whose explicit utterance is thought to be unnecessary is a very common linguistic practice. Generally, the acceptability of omitting an occurrence of an expression with a particular content tracks the presence of the same expression with the same content in an earlier clause. For instance, (15) is a grammatical alternative to (15a).

(15) Charles had one piece of pie, and Margaret had two.

(15a) Charles had one piece of pie and Margaret had two pieces of pie.
In contrast, (16) sounds distinctly odd as an alternative to (16a).\textsuperscript{39}

(16) *John threw a party and Jane a baseball.

(16a) John threw a party and Jane threw a baseball.

This is presumably because the content that ‘threw’ contributes is somewhat different in each of its occurrences in (16). However, the acceptability of an omission does not always track sameness of content. It is possible to grammatically omit certain expressions from a secondary clause even though the content of the second clause is relevantly different from the first. For example, (17) represents one way of expressing the information that John and Jim each walked their own dog.

(17) John walked his dog, and Jim did, too.

These sorts of grammatical omissions, known as sloppy anaphora, suggest that successful communication is possible even when the omission of certain expressions is not grounded in their having the same content as expressions used earlier.

The linguistic phenomenon of sloppy anaphora provides some foundation on which the contextualist can stake her claim that assertions like Charles’ above involve a shift of context mid-sentence. Even though the second occurrence of tasty is omitted, it could still contribute a content that is different from (though related to) the first occurrence. However, the appeal to a context shift does not by itself eliminate the objectivist worry. The intuitive force of Charles’ denial in the second clause is that of denying the truth of Margaret’s belief. This, however, is not the exact significance that the contextualist must propose. Instead, the contextualist proposal is that Charles denies

\textsuperscript{39} I have marked (16) with (*), which I have been using to indicate ungrammaticality throughout this chapter. Ungrammaticality is too strong a characterization of the fault in (16). However, there is a strong sense that in most scenarios, an utterance of (16) would at least be infelicitous.
that the food is tasty to him. The contextualist must maintain that his denial is only superficially tied to the belief that Margaret holds. The worry now becomes that the contextualist interpretation does not capture the intuitive force of Charles’ assertion.

I think the worry here is that if Charles’ assertion is to make any sense at all, he must take his second clause to be strongly related in some way to his first clause. In particular, he takes the content of the two clauses to be in conflict. Thus, the worry in this case seems to be the same challenge that faultless disagreement apparently presents to the contextualist; namely, the contextualist account of PPTs holds that the two clauses of Charles’ assertion do not semantically conflict. Likewise, it seems to me that the same sort of response that the contextualist gives to the challenge of faultless disagreement can be given to answer this challenge as well. In presenting Margaret’s belief via the first clause of his assertion, Charles does more than just express the proposition that the food item is tasty to Margaret. He also uses this clause to introduce his second clause that it is not tasty to him. I think we can plausibly interpret Charles as using his reference to Margaret’s belief to substantiate the assertion of his own opinion. And his method is a viable one given the fact that presupposition of similarity is a significant aspect of our understanding of matters of taste. The contextualist interpretation of Charles’ assertion can make sense of the conflict between its two clauses by appealing to the pragmatic effect of the first clause of introducing the presupposition of similarity between he and Margaret that he subsequently denies.
5.6. Conclusion

In addition to offering a viable representation of the linguistic data provided by discourses such as *Chili*, contextualism regarding the semantics of predicates of personal taste is an independently viable position. The contextualist claim that predicates such as ‘tasty’ have a slot in their argument structure for phrases incorporating the thematic role of experiencer is supported by a number of grammaticality tests, and the contextualist interpretation of predicates of personal taste is able to account for a wide variety of circumstances in which they are used.

The defense of contextualism that I have presented appeals extensively to the pragmatic effects of utterances in conversation to make sense of the intuition that various sentences are in conflict. Far from being a questionable move, I feel that this approach to semantic theorizing has much to recommend it. Natural languages are not just abstract structures that happen to be put into use. They are, in part, products of their use. When we engage in linguistic theorizing, we ought to respect the semantic significance of our various intuitions regarding the grammaticality of sentences; if for no other reason, the cognitive limitations of language speakers seem to demand that linguistic practice follows many rules that hold of sentences generally, independent of their use. But we also need to recognize that humans use language as a tool, and the job that any tool can be used to perform depends significantly on the circumstances in which it is put to use. Given the history that humans have using the tool of language, it should come as no surprise that a number of our intuitions regarding aspects of natural language track features of its use that go beyond its semantic features.
The pragmatic principles that are appealed to in this defense of contextualism serve two roles. They serve to explain some of our linguistic intuitions regarding certain cases in a way that allows us to avoid the questionable appeal to relative truth. But they also serve to explain these intuitions in a systematic way that respects the fact that these intuitions track significant features of natural language and not just quirks of individual utterances.

In light of these considerations, I think that contextualism offers the most plausible account of the semantics of predicates of personal taste. It arguably captures the linguistic data as well as relativism, and it does so without an appeal to additional semantic structure that potentially undermines the systematicity of the account it provides of our shared linguistic knowledge. And while contextualism does demand a greater complication to semantic theory than does its invariantist counterpart, this is significantly outweighed by the superior account of the linguistic data that contextualism offers.
References


