

Feigning Objectivity: An Overlooked Conversational Strategy in Everyday Disputes

Dissertation

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I reconsider core cases of alleged “faultless disagreement,” beginning with disputes about matters of taste. I argue that these cases demand no revisions to traditional truth-conditional semantics and that, instead, their interesting features—those features that theorists have *thought* to pose difficulties to traditional semantics—are in fact best explained at the level of pragmatics, rhetoric, and sociolinguistics. Specifically, I maintain that such disputes arise in situations in which, given conversational aims, it is rhetorically effective for disputants to *feign contradiction*—posturing *as if* their dispute concerned the truth of an “objective” proposition, even if this is not in fact the case.

I demonstrate, moreover, that many canonical cases of so-called “merely verbal” disputes share these same interesting features of “faultless” disputes about taste—and that these disputes as well can be explained as rhetorically effective instances of merely “feigned” objectivity. Philosophical discussion of both types of disputes has been hampered by their uncritical assimilation to canonical “faultless” disputes—despite the differences in social role that become evident when the disputes are situated in their context of production—and this has led philosophers too often to neglect other important social and rhetorical reasons for which speakers express disagreement.

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I reconsider core cases of alleged “faultless disagreement,” beginning with disputes about matters of taste. I argue that these cases demand no revisions to traditional truth-conditional semantics and that, instead, their interesting features—those features that theorists have *thought* to pose difficulties to traditional semantics—are in fact best explained at the level of pragmatics, rhetoric, and sociolinguistics. Specifically, I maintain that such disputes arise in situations in which, given conversational aims, it is rhetorically effective for disputants to *feign contradiction*—posturing *as if* their dispute concerned the truth of an “objective” proposition, even if this is not in fact the case.

I demonstrate, moreover, that many canonical cases of so-called “merely verbal” disputes share these same interesting features of “faultless” disputes about taste—and that these disputes as well can be explained as rhetorically effective instances of merely “feigned” objectivity. Philosophical discussion of both types of disputes has been hampered by their uncritical assimilation to canonical “faultless” disputes—despite the differences in social role that become evident when the disputes are situated in their context of production—and this has led philosophers too often to neglect other important social and rhetorical reasons for which speakers express disagreement.

In Chapter 1, taking disputes about taste as a case study, I reanalyze the

characteristics of these linguistic exchanges that have been alleged to require radical revisions to traditional frameworks in linguistics and philosophy of language. My aim in this chapter is to unearth precisely what features of these “faultless disagreements” have helped to convince some theorists of the need to allow for sentences that express mutually true but jointly inconsistent propositions. Noting that pre-theoretical notions of “faultlessness” and “disagreement” do not entail (respectively) truth and contradiction, I attempt to identify what it is about the particular senses of “faultlessness” and “disagreement” observed in taste disputes that have lead some philosophers to postulate that these disputes involve contradiction and mutual truth—yet I attempt to do so without, as some authors have done, building this semantic interpretation into the very description of the data to be explained. The proposed redescription of the explananda, which I call “FD-Shape,” lays the groundwork for reassessing several debates within the philosophy of language and metametaphysics.

As I close Chapter 1, I argue that FD-Shape is sufficient to motivate relativism about predicates of personal taste *given* common assumptions about conversational norms (which I call “truth norm” and “contradiction norm”). In the remainder of this dissertation, I argue that the assumption that truth norm and contradiction norm govern disputes about taste (and, as I will show, other similarly structured disputes)—and assumption that philosophers and semanticists typically take on without question—is precisely what must be denied if we are to provide an explanation of the striking features of the disputes captured by FD-Shape.

Then, in Chapter 2, I argue that the peculiar features of disputes about taste are

best explained by denying that speakers in such exchanges obey the conversational norms mentioned above. Instead, I claim, stereotypical disputes about taste occur in situations in which it is rational to *violate* these norms for rhetorical effect. I maintain that—rather than demanding any novel semantic solution—the “shape” of these disputes is best explained as a communicative strategy somewhat akin to hyperbole or overstatement, in which disputants “feign objectivity” to lend emphasis or intensity to their taste claims. Armed with the latter explanation, one can account for the verbal behavior observed in objectively-framed taste disputes even on the most simple-minded traditional semantic accounts. I maintain that my explanation at this socio-pragmatic level of description is sufficient to account for the interesting and striking features of disagreement data, as captured by FD-Shape, and I abstain from proposing any account of the *semantics* of predicates of personal taste. As demonstrated in this chapter, the pragmatic and rhetorical notion of “feigning objectivity” does not itself dictate selection of a certain semantic account of these predicates.

In Chapter 3, continuing to adopt FD-Shape as a proxy for faultless disagreement, I consider the arguments of philosophers and linguists who have charged that a much broader range of predicates—not merely predicates of personal taste—are amenable to use in “faultless” disputes. My conclusion in this chapter is that no predicate is in principle immune from use in disputes that possess FD-Shape. In this, I go beyond other theorists who have noted that certain types of predicates, such as vague scalar predicates, appear in faultless disagreements. I take this to be further evidence that it is misguided to seek an explanation of the disagreement phenomena on the level of semantics—or, at

least, a challenge to theorists who *do* wish to draw semantic conclusions from the appearance of faultless disagreement to clarify what, beyond the characteristics summarized in FD-Shape, motivates these conclusions. These new data also extend the explanatory challenge: the account developed in Chapter 2 applies specifically to disputes about taste, but it is not immediately obvious that it can be extended to these others exchanges that are shown in Chapter 3 to embody similar peculiar features. I argue in the following chapter that, indeed, the account *can* be extended.

In Chapter 4, I return to the idea of “feigning objectivity” introduced in Chapter 2. Here, I argue that the same basic interpretation applies in the case of many so-called “merely verbal” disputes—including many of the cases introduced in Chapter 3. Just as I reject a semantic explanation of faultless disputes *about taste*, I believe that most disputes that seem easily identified as possessing FD-Shape require a pragmatic or rhetorical explanation. In addition to uniting the threads developed in Chapters 2 and 3, Chapter 4 targets the *negotiation view* of verbal disputes. The negotiation view could explain FD-Shape on the supposition that the disputants are coordinating or “negotiating” the meaning of the predicate in use. While I have some sympathy for this view, which provides a charitable interpretation of many disputes that other philosophers dismiss as “merely verbal” and therefore trivial or silly, I contend that it cannot accurately be applied to many such disputes—disputes that, nonetheless, are rational and worthwhile conversational activities that theorists *should* charitably accommodate. Instead, I show that many such “merely verbal” disputes occur in affectively-charged contexts—following from the fact that the conditions by which speakers are willing to apply certain

predicates reveal features of the speaker that become available for evaluation—in which rhetorical intensifiers are used and useful. Drawing upon these observations, I conclude that the account of Chapter 2 is readily applied to these other “FD-Shaped” disputes as well: denying another speaker’s ascription of a predicate to some object can be a rhetorically effective way to condemn or delegitimize the background factors underlying that speaker’s ascription of the predicate to the object in question. The broader message of Chapter 4 is that a dispute need not “aim at” agreement on the truth-value of the contested claim in order to be a rational, socially beneficial conversational activity.

Chapter 5 provides concluding discussion, and briefly revisits lingering issues—the application of sociolinguistic theory to explaining why speakers sometimes choose to frame disputes “objectively,” and the broad shape of explanations of why certain predicates occur disproportionately often in FD-Shaped disputes—which I take to lay the basis for further research.

One conclusion of this dissertation is that stereotypical disputes about taste and many canonical “merely verbal” disputes—disputes that have traditionally been discussed in distinct bodies of philosophical literature—actually share striking commonalities. At the same time, though, I anticipate that many readers will be struck by my lack of attention to epistemic modal sentences, given their prevalence in the literature on “faultless disagreements.” Thus, I include Appendix A to address some of the disanalogies between “faultless disagreements” about matters of taste—and the various other disputes discussed in this dissertation—and alleged faultless disputes involving epistemic modal sentences, which some notable theorists have taken to reveal the same

basic phenomenon and demand a similar semantic solution.

Chapter 1: Reconsidering “Faultless Disagreement”

In this chapter, I present the central phenomenon of interest in this dissertation: a type of linguistic exchange in which speakers are willing to deny each others claims (and might even be said to appear to express contradictory propositions) even though neither speaker seems to be mistaken about the facts. Examples of this type of linguistic exchange have emerged in philosophical discussions of “faultless disagreement” (about, e.g., matters of taste and borderline cases of vague predicates), “merely verbal disputes,” and related topics, where they have been employed for purposes ranging from motivating examples in arguments in favor of radical revisions to traditional truth-conditional semantics (as discussed in this chapter) to illustrations of trivial disputes of the sort that philosophers ought to avoid (as mentioned in Chapter 4).

I will presently focus on the use of such so-called “faultless disagreement” cases to motivate revisionary semantic proposals. To begin, I will approach the explananda from the perspective of influential discussions of disagreement about matters of taste or inclination (e.g., Kölbel 2003, Wright 2006), which influentially suggested that these disputes are both common in everyday discourse and problematic to traditional semantic theories—and that, therefore, philosophical semantics should be revised so as to

charitably accommodate them.¹ Although Kölbel, Wright, and other authors have described the phenomenon as “faultless disagreement,” it is significant that there are intuitively plausible precisifications of this expression that do *not* entail any threatening ramifications for traditional semantic theories. Thus, in what follows, I take care to elucidate what faultless disagreement *must be* if it is to pose the threats to traditional semantics that it has been claimed to pose. I then present a redescription of the core explananda—or, perhaps better, the core explananda *that theorists have seemed implicitly to rely upon*—which I call “FD-Shape.” I believe that, if FD-Shape does *not* capture what lies at the heart of the alleged problems of faultless disagreement, the burden to argue otherwise is on the theorist with an interest in the semantic ramifications of faultless disagreement.

As I will discuss in later chapters (especially Chapter 3), theorists have claimed that faultless disagreement emerges in many discourses—such as, notably, any discourse involving the ascription of vague predicates. For illustrative purposes, however, I will initially concentrate on what has historically been presented as one of the best case scenarios for faultless disagreement: disputes about matters of taste. The framework developed for understanding the allegedly troubling features of these disputes will later be applied to a much broader range of disputes; at present, however, it will suffice to

¹ Kölbel and Wright are notable in that they have gone farther than other theorists in describing the phenomenon of “faultless disagreement” *per se*. In contrast, John MacFarlane (2014) abstains from the language of “faultless disagreement” (cf. pp. 133ff for discussion), while others like Peter Lasersohn (2005) illustrate the notion via example and related intuition-mongering but not provide an analysis. Nonetheless, however, MacFarlane, Lasersohn, and other theorists invoke many of the same intuitions when arguing for their preferred semantic accounts on the basis of disagreement data.

focus on this particular case.²

1. The Explananda

Theorists such as Max Kölbel, Crispin Wright, and Peter Lasersohn, among others, have argued that certain predicates—such as, paradigmatically, predicates of personal taste—permit *faultless disagreement*: a state in which two speakers, one who assents to ‘*a* is F’ and one who assents to ‘*a* is not F’, genuinely *disagree* about whether *a* is F even though *neither is mistaken*.³ Speakers with different gustatory preferences, for example, might faultlessly disagree about whether rhubarb is tasty. In this chapter, I will constrain discussion to *predicates of personal taste*, which have been the central example presented in much of literature on the topic. (I will turn to other predicates in Chapter 3.)

In later chapters, I will argue that philosophers and semanticists have been mistaken in their theorizing about faultless disagreement. I agree that such disputes are theoretically interesting aspects of everyday discourse that have been unduly neglected by traditional philosophy of language; however, I diverge considerably with respect to what I consider to be the best explanation thereof—and, in particular, I deny that a charitable account of apparent faultless disagreement requires any revisions of traditional truth-conditional semantics. I will complete this argument in Chapter 2. Before

² I will, for the most part, continue to limit my discussion to simple subject-predicate sentences (and their negations)—ignoring modals, conditionals, and other constructions that have been implicated in similar phenomena. (“Faultlessness” in disputes involving epistemic modals seems to be a significantly different phenomenon; see Appendix.)

³ See, for example, Kölbel (2003), Lasersohn (2005), Richard (2004), and Wright (2006, 2008).

proceeding, however, we must first clarify what the phenomenon of interest seems to *be*—what precise features of alleged cases of faultless disagreement seem to catch the attention of semanticists and philosophers of language. Taking disputes about taste as a case study, I reconstruct the explananda in terms of what I call “FD-Shape,” a more semantically-neutral condition that appears sufficient to motivate common disagreement-based worries for traditional semantics. That is my task in this chapter.

1.1 Objectively-Framed Disputes

Consider the following disputes taken from online discussion forums.⁴

- (1) bs13690:
Pie is tasty. Especially the pie from Anderson’s catering. Yum!
- DMG721:
LMFAO! **Nonsense! Pie is not tasty at all.** This is just another example of what happens when all of these transplants move to Charlotte and bring with them their preference for things like pie.⁵
- (2) rYokucHa:
Why do some people eat vegemite? **It’s disgusting.** ... Why is this nonsense? Are they mad?
- MADDIE:
vegemite isn’t disgusting, as long as you only put a tiny bit on. i like it :)
- Jack B [to rYokucHa]:
its not disgusting. its yummy. its only okay if you put a little bit on. but i

⁴ This document includes a significant amount of data from on-line discussion forums. Aside from the uses of bold font, all examples quoted have been transcribed without modification; I leave it to the reader to insert ‘sic’ as needed or desired.

⁵ “Pie is tasty” (Sep 2, 2011) Charlotte, NC forum. City-Data. Accessed Apr 15, 2013. <<http://www.city-data.com/forum/charlotte/1370756-pie-tasty-charlotte-hickory-appointed-transplants.html#ixzz22WD0yqrm>>.

only like it on toast.⁶

- (3) WiseGoat:
The game [Diablo 3] isn't fun, there's nothing exciting happening, ...

DinoPlanta:
Diablo 3 is fun. Period.

Obzen:
Diablo 3 is fun. Sorry.

WiseGoat:
I hope you guys never played Diablo or D2.

DinoPlanta:
I did played both of those games, and I don't enjoy D1, and I prefer D3 over D2.

Obzen:
I played both. **This game is more fun**.⁷

In what follows, I will refer to sentences like the bold-faced sentences in (1), (2), and (3) as *objectively-framed taste sentences*. These can be understood in contrast to *subjectively-framed taste sentences* (e.g. "I don't enjoy D1, and I prefer D3 over D2" and "I only like it on toast"), which make explicit reference to the speaker.

Correspondingly, I will refer to dialogues that possess the following features as *objectively-framed taste disputes*:

- 'F' is a predicate of personal taste (e.g. 'tasty', 'disgusting', or 'fun');
- Initial speaker A says '*a* is F' or '*a* is not F';
- Second speaker (respondent) B says '*a* is not F' (if A says '*a* is F') or '*a* is F' (if A says

⁶ "Why do some people eat Vegemite?" Yahoo Answers (2009), accessed Apr 15, 2013, <<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20081221220715AA8XDub>>.

⁷ "Diablo 3 Isn't Fun. Sorry," Diablo III Forums (June 10, 2010), accessed Apr 15, 2013, <<http://us.battle.net/d3/en/forum/topic/5730075200>>.

‘*a* is not *F*’).

I assume that (1), (2), and (3) contain fairly stereotypical examples of objectively-framed taste disputes.

Philosophers have often depicted objectively-framed taste disputes as instances of “faultless disagreement,” where the relevant sense of “disagreement” is thought to require that the propositions semantically expressed by the speakers’ utterances are *contradictory*, and the relevant sense of “faultlessness” is thought to require that both are *true*. And it is this, primarily, that has brought such disputes to the attention of semantics. According to traditional semantic views, if two utterances express contradictory contents, then they cannot both be true—and if they are both true, they must then express consistent contents. “Faultless disagreement,” thus construed, seems therefore paradoxical. The need to accommodate this peculiar feature of objectively-framed taste disputes has led to the proposal of novel semantic theories such as relativism—as in, perhaps most notably, the work of Lasnik (2005) and MacFarlane (2007, 2014)—and, more recently, views on which such disputes are interpreted as activities in which speakers negotiate the standard for applying ‘tasty’ or ‘fun’ (and so on) within their conversational context (cf. Barker 2013). (Although I focus on relativism here, I critique the latter view in Chapter 4.)

My own task, however, is not to defend a particular account of the semantics of alleged “faultless disagreement.” Indeed, as I have noted, I will eventually argue that the best explanation of this phenomenon requires no special semantic apparatus—although, at the same time, I maintain that it *does* require a more sophisticated understating of

pragmatic and sociolinguistic features of disputes. Before I defend my socio-pragmatic account of objectively-framed taste disputes—on which the sense of “disagreement” in objectively-framed disputes about taste does not entail contradiction, and the sense of “faultlessness” does not entail mutual truth—we must examine why theorists have often concluded that the phenomenon *does* have such ramifications for semantics. This being so, my present goal is simply to identify more precisely what the explananda are. This requires us to distinguish objectively-framed taste disputes—like those that occur in (1), (2), and (3)—from, on one hand, exchanges that manifest “disagreement” in some sense but not contradiction and, on the other hand, exchanges that manifest “faultlessness” in some sense but not mutual truth. Doing so will not only help to reveal where we can, and must, block the argument to relativism but also demonstrate that these disputes are interestingly dissimilar from stereotypical factual disputes *independent of* any specifically semantic implications.

1.2 The Disagreement Explanandum

It is important to be cautious in articulating the precise sense in which the disputants in objectively-framed taste disputes appear to disagree. Even though some theorists have simply conflated ‘disagreement’ with ‘contradiction’, it appears that—in some cases—speakers can be accurately described as *disagreeing* even when their assertions do not express contradictory propositions.⁸ Consider, for example, this fictional variant on (1):

⁸ Apparent examples of conflation include Lasersohn (2005, p. 647), Stephenson (2007, pp. 491ff), and Wright (2006, p. 36); see also critics like Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009,

(1*) bs13690:
I like pie. Especially the pie from Anderson’s catering. Yum!

DMG721:
LMFAO! You’re crazy! I don’t like pie at all.

Most speakers, I presume, would report that the interlocutors in (1*) *disagree*—but here, of course, there is no temptation to claim that their utterances express contradictory propositions; bs13690 and DMG721 merely state consistent claims about their respective (and differing) attitudes towards pie.

Plausibly, the disagreement in (1*) could be described as *disagreement in attitude*, à la Stevenson (1937), or *non-cotenability* in the sense of MacFarlane (2014). MacFarlane defines the latter as a type of disagreement in which one speaker has an attitude that the other could not adopt without changing one of her own—whether this attitude is cognitive or non-cognitive (pp. 121-124).⁹ Since the attitude in question could be a mere *liking* or *disliking* of some subject of evaluation, the speakers in (1*) could be said to express disagreement in this sense. The same could be said of both speakers in (1) had they appended “...to me,” “...by my lights,” or “...IMHO” to their respective utterances of “Pie is tasty” and “Pie is not tasty.” This is because, in each case, bs13690 and DMG721 would have revealed that they hold different non-cognitive attitudes toward pie (bs13690 likes it, and DMG721 does not)—which suffices to show that they “disagree” in some sense of the term. When presented with these alternative dialogues,

pp. 109-110, 113) and Glanzberg (2007, pp. 1-19; esp. p. 16).

⁹ Although the notions are similar, MacFarlane’s “non-cotenability” differs from Stevenson’s “disagreement in attitude” in that MacFarlane omits the qualification that one speaker must have some reason to call into question, or seek to change, the attitude of the other.

however, there is no temptation to conclude that bs13690 and DMG721's utterances express contradictory propositions.

The exchanges in (1), (2), and (3) also clearly involve non-cotenability—since, here too, the speakers reveal that they have differently valenced affective attitudes toward pie, Vegemite, and Diablo III (respectively). The question, however, is whether non-cotenability is the *only* type of disagreement present in objectively-framed taste disputes. MacFarlane himself, like other theorists, argues that there is good evidence that the disputants disagree in a stronger sense—a sense that *does* require us to postulate that they express contradictory contents. One important datum is that it would be felicitous for the respondent in (1), (2), or (3)—but not in (1*)—to use ‘No’ in replying to the controversial taste claim.¹⁰ Note, indeed, that I omitted “Nonsense!” from DMG721’s line in the explicitly subjectively-phrased exchange (1*): since DMG721 does not deny that bs13690 likes pie, it would be inappropriate for him to “No!” or “Nonsense!” in reply to bs13690’s utterance of “I like pie.” Likewise, if bs13690 had said “Pie tastes good to me,” DMG721 could not have felicitously replied “No, it doesn’t” or “No, it doesn’t taste good to me.” (And it would be inaccurate for DMG721 to reply simply “No, it doesn’t,” since DMG721 surely does not deny that pie tastes good to bs13690.)

Following Sundell (2011), I will refer to this feature of disputes like (1), (2), and (3) as *felicity of denial*. Importantly, felicity of denial does not hold in situations in which

¹⁰ Cf. MacFarlane (2014, p. 131), Lasersohn (2005, p. 647), and Stephenson (2007, pp. 492-493). (Indeed, Stephenson writes that when she claims disagreement is possible in taste disputes, she just *means* that “expressions like ‘no (it isn’t)’ and ‘nuh-uh’ are allowed” (p. 493).)

speakers use *subjectively-framed* taste sentences to reveal their non-cotenable preferences or affective states.

Arguably, then, felicity of denial is evidence in favor of the thesis that the sentences used in (1) and (2) are contradictory. As Sundell demonstrates, however, it is not *conclusive* evidence—for ‘No’ can be used felicitously even in some clear cases of non-contradiction. Consider metalinguistic negation:

(4) A [pointing to an aquarium filled with cephalopods]:
Those are octopi.

B:
No, those aren’t octopi. They’re octopods.

In (4), B’s use of ‘No’ seems felicitous, yet it does not seem that A and B assert contradictory contents. B agrees with A that the cephalopods in question belong to the order Octopoda; B merely rejects (and corrects) A’s use of the plural form ‘octopi’. In this case, clearly, the felicity of denial should not persuade us that B expresses a proposition that contradicts the content of A’s claim.

I believe that a reasonable reply here is to stress the lack of evidence that speakers in objectively-framed taste disputes employ a metalinguistic or other non-truth-functional use of negation. On this front, I propose two additional conditions—*felicity of non-cancellation* and *mutual use*—that seem to differentiate the cases of interest, about which theorists tend to lack the tutored intuition that the use of negation is “special,” from cases like (4).¹¹ (There might be other significant differences, but this should at least

¹¹ I am omitting discussion of some tests for metalinguistic negation used by semanticists, which seem less applicable in our cases of concern, such as those of Horn (1985, 1989).

provide a valuable start.)

1. Felicity of non-cancellation: there is seldom need to cancel misleading implications that might arise from the denial of an objectively-framed taste sentence; thus, such exchanges typically seem felicitous even if the respondent utters *no more* than the negation of the sentence used by the initial speaker (or even if respondent merely utters ‘No’). In (3), for example, it does not seem conversationally inappropriate for DinoPlanta to post only “Diablo 3 is fun. Period.” In context, the post seems acceptable and not at all misleading. In (4), in contrast, B’s continuation of “They’re octopods” appears necessary on pain of misleading the audience; if she had replied only “No, they aren’t,” she would seem to deny that the animals in question belong to the order Octopoda—but it is clear from the exchange as written that she does not deny the latter. (We might add that if B were to utter “They’re not octopi,” then—even without the continuation—the stress on ‘pi’ could facilitate the intended interpretation. However, nothing like this marked pattern of stress appears in objectively-framed taste disputes.)¹²

2. Mutual use: both speakers in dialogues like (1), (2), and (3) are willing to use the word whose application is under dispute (i.e. ‘tasty’, ‘disgusting’, and ‘fun’) in other contexts—including, notably, contexts in which the term appears outside of the scope of negation (and outside of any quotation devices and so on). This also contrasts with cases of metalinguistic negation like (4). Although B might use ‘octopi’ within the scope of

¹² Although I have chosen an example of metalinguistic negation, the felicity of non-cancellation condition should also exclude cases of *presuppositional negation* from our purview, as when A says “Sean stopped smoking” and B replies “No, he didn’t; he *never* smoked.” (Here, if B had simply said “No, he didn’t,” he would suggest that he believes that Sean *continues* to smoke.)

negation when she is correcting other speakers (as in, e.g., “They’re not octopi...”), it seems precisely her point that ‘octopi’ is—in general—improper to use. She herself would use ‘octopi’ in classifying or describing animals, for example, as opposed to correcting or echoing others’ uses thereof.

I conclude discussion of the disagreement explanandum by introducing a new piece of terminology, which I invoke frequently in what follows: I will say that two utterances *S* and *R* manifest *Contradiction Shape* if *S* and *R* occur in the presence of cues like those discussed above—felicity of denial, felicity of non-cancellation, and mutual use—that might be taken as evidence that *S* and *R* express contradictory propositions. To be a bit more precise: *S* and *R* manifest Contradiction Shape if the mutual use condition is met and *the respondent* judges denial and non-cancellation to be appropriate when using *R* to reply to *S* (that is: if B, in uttering *R* in reply to A’s utterance *S*, judges denial and non-cancellation to be felicitous, and does not generally object to a word occurring in *S*).

Correspondingly, when I speak of the respondent B’s “invoking” or “inducing” Contradiction Shape in denying A’s utterance of ‘*a* is F’, I mean that B is generally disposed to use ‘F’ and would judge it appropriate to reply to the utterance with ‘No’ and without cancellation. (Note that the latter might hold even if, in actuality, he does not *say* ‘No’ or says *more* than ‘*a* is not F’.) Given this precisification, Contradiction Shape can be described a bit more accurately as a cluster of cues that might be taken as evidence that B *aims to* use *R* to contradict the content expressed by *S*. The sentences used in objectively-framed taste disputes manifest Contradiction Shape.

The last point to make—with respect to the “disagreement” explanandum at

least—is that, in objectively-framed taste disputes like those in (1), (2), and (3), it does not seem that the disputants are merely “talking past one another” in the sense that they fail to contradict one another despite aiming or attempting to do so. In our new terminology, we can say that the respondents in these exchanges do not appear to invoke Contradiction Shape merely out of ignorance or error. In contrast, consider the following fictional dialogues:

(5) A [on phone with B, in Grandview, and believing that B is in Grandview]:
Want to get coffee? Luck Bros [a coffee shop in Grandview] is nearby.

B [on phone with A, in Westerville, and believing that A is in so too]:
No, it's not.

(6) A [at a pet store, noticing that the kittens have escaped from cage]:
The kittens are free!

B [not noticing that the kittens have escaped, recalling that they are \$1]:
No, they aren't.

(7) A [American, in bank queue, watching inebriated but cordial customer]:
Well, at least he's not pissed like a lot of the customers here.

B [British, in same queue, observing the same customer]:
Nonsense! He bloody well *is* pissed!

Contradiction Shape evidently holds in (5), (6), and (7): in each case, given B's beliefs about the conversational context, B judges that it felicitous to reply using 'No' (or 'Nonsense!') and does not deem it necessary to “cancel” any misleading implication of the denial of A's utterance. Further, it is clear that none are cases in which B merely objects to A's using a certain word.

Importantly, however, in each of (5), (6), and (7), Contradiction Shape appears to arise *only* due to B's ignorance. In (5), for example, if B had possessed accurate

information about A's whereabouts, B presumably would not have replied in a way that induces Contradiction Shape (but, instead, would at least deem it necessary to continue with the explanation "...I'm in Westerville"). Similarly, in (6), B is unaware that A intends to use 'free' to mean *unrestrained* rather than *costing nothing*—and, in (7), B seems not to realize that Americans use 'pissed' to mean *angry* rather than *drunk*. In these cases, Contradiction Shape arises only due to B's misinterpretation of A's words: if B had known what A *meant*, B would *not* have contested A's claim. In exchanges like (1), (2), and (3), on the other hand, the respondent does not appear to be missing any information—such as information about the context or language of A—that would have caused him not to invoke Contradiction Shape.

A common assumption—although one that I will reject—is that Contradiction Shape between two utterances *S* and *R* is licensed only if *S* and *R* express contradictory propositions. Thus, if a competent and informed speaker invokes Contradiction Shape between *S* and *R*—between, for example, the two respective utterances of "Pie is tasty" and "Pie is not tasty" (and "Diablo 3 is not fun" and "Diablo 3 is fun," etc.)—then *S* and *R* presumably express contradictory contents.

1.3 The Faultlessness Explanandum

Before discussing common precisifications of "faultlessness," we should emphasize that most discussion of the disagreement data occurs against the background assumption that

disputants *aim at truth* when they utter objectively-framed taste sentences.¹³ A consequence of this assumption is that it is an error *of some sort* if a disputant fails to express a true proposition. The question, then, is whether asserting a *true* proposition is necessary for the relevant sense of faultlessness—or whether a weaker notion of faultlessness, compatible with the failure to assert a true proposition, is sufficient. Relativists argue for the former position.

Kölbel (2003) and Wright (2006), for instance, note that a speaker might be said to be “without fault” as long as he asserts what is *reasonable for him to believe* given his evidence. That is, one can be said to be “faultless,” in a sense, if one is *justified* in believing the content of one’s assertion—even if the content of this assertion is, in fact, *false*. Kölbel, however, notices a problem in applying this interpretation of “faultlessness” to taste disputes: it cannot explain why the very occurrence of disagreement often fails to lead the disputants to conclude that one “is mistaken and that therefore further discussion or investigation is called for” (p. 58). Similarly, Wright worries that the suggestion ignores the intuition that the disputants “may, perfectly rationally, stick to their respective views even after the disagreement comes to light and impresses as intractable” (p. 38). Such stubborn persistence in the face of disagreement is not typically rational: even if A is initially justified in believing that *p*, and B is initially justified in believing that $\sim p$, the fact that A and B disagree about the truth of *p* is itself

¹³ Some authors mention expressivism as an alternative but, having identified “disagreement” with contradiction, assume that the burden of proof is those who claim that non-assertoric speech acts can stand in relations of contradiction (cf. Kölbel 2003, pp. 64-66; Lasersohn 2005, pp. 656-657).

relevant evidence to which A and B should show sensitivity (if only by acknowledging need for further inquiry). Let it be that A is initially justified in believing *p* on the basis of A's evidence; this does not entail that A would *remain* faultless if A were not to further investigate *p*—or at least lose some degree of confidence in *p*—upon later hearing B deny *p*. In objectively-framed taste disputes, however, A seems insensitive to the evidence that B contests A's claim.

Another concern is that, in stereotypical objectively-framed taste disputes, neither disputant seems to lack information that would cause him to retract his utterance—in contrast, once again, to stereotypical factual disagreements in which one party asserts something false. Lasersohn, for example, entertains the suggestion that objectively-framed taste sentences express propositions about the preferences of the *majority*—but he notes that knowledge about what the majority of people actually prefer would seem powerless to convince individuals to retract contrary taste claims. Suppose, for instance, that most people enjoy riding a certain roller coaster—but Mary, who does not, asserts “That roller coaster is not fun.” Lasersohn comments: “If Mary has ridden on the roller coaster and knows that she does not like it, surely John will not be able to convince her that it is fun by showing her the results of a survey!” (2005, p. 652). Facts about the preferences of experts also seem unlikely to sway speakers in exchanges like (1), (2), and (3)—and it is hard to think of what sort of evidence *would* (cf. Lasersohn's remarks on p. 655; those who contest this intuition should see my disclaimer in §3).

In short, then, the theorist must account for the robustness with which both speakers appear disposed to assert their respective claims in the face of potentially

relevant evidence. Under the supposition that one disputant *speaks falsely*, the robustness with which both disputants seem disposed to assert their respective claims does not appear rational. But this conflicts with the intuition that the speakers are faultless. Relativists conclude, therefore, that it is not sufficient to posit that both disputants are *justified* in their assertions (despite the fact that one asserts something *false*); it must be that both assert *true* propositions.

2. FD-Shape

It should now be apparent that, if we are to isolate the semantically interesting features of objectively-framed taste disputes, we must say something stronger than that the disputants seem to “disagree faultlessly.” As we have seen in §1, there can be exchanges in which speakers assert mutually true propositions (e.g. concerning the speakers’ respective non-cognitive attitudes), but disagree only in a sense that does not entail contradiction (e.g. MacFarlane’s “non-cotenability” or Stevenson’s “disagreement in attitude”); moreover, there can be exchanges in which two speakers contradict one another but are *faultless* only in the sense that both are justified on the basis of their present evidence. These types of exchanges—although arguably “faultless disagreements” *in a sense*—do not pose special problems for semantics. Meanwhile, however, we should not simply claim that the cases of interest are those in which the disputants assert mutually true but jointly inconsistent propositions—since, after all, this is the claim that I will reject in Chapter 2.

It is for these reasons that I introduce *FD-Shape*—which I intend to serve as an

intermediate level of description between the relatively uninformative diagnosis of “faultless disagreement” and more precise, yet controversial, semantic descriptions such as “contradiction and mutual truth.” I define FD-Shape as follows: let D be an objectively-framed dispute that manifests Contradiction Shape; D possesses FD-Shape if the following jointly obtain:

Faultlessness Analogue

Given our evidence about D, we expect that there is no information¹⁴ I such that: If A and B had possessed I in the contexts in which their respective utterances occurred, either A or B would not have produced his actual utterance.¹⁵

Disagreement Analogue

Given our evidence about D, we expect that there is no information I such that: If B had possessed I in the context in which B’s utterance occurred, B would not have responded to A’s utterance in a way that induces Contradiction Shape.

Competence Constraint

¹⁴ We can assume here that “information” is *true* information. Furthermore, there is no need to limit the information in question to “non-taste” information. The intuition is that, even knowledge of sundry facts related to taste will not necessarily dissolve stereotypical disputes about taste; some speakers will continue to assert certain taste claims irrespective of knowledge of the preferences of the experts, the majority opinion, and so on. (This is simply the intuition that Lasersohn invokes in the passages cited in §1.3.) Presumably, many speakers would also not be dissuaded from changing their expressed opinion on the tastiness of Vegemite, for example, in light of a full disclosure of the facts about the chemistry, physiology, and psychology of the sense of taste and the chemical properties of Vegemite.

Granted, some semantic theories entail that there is a fact of the matter as to whether Vegemite *is tasty* (full stop). The relevant intuition here is that, even if such a semantic theory is correct, some speakers would not be responsive to such “tastiness information” or “tastiness facts.” (More likely, I assume, they would find this a counterintuitive position that has little bearing on their everyday practice of disputing matters of taste; cf. my comments on the folk theory of taste discourse in Chapter 2.)

¹⁵ One might worry that Faultlessness Analogue, as well as Disagreement Analogue, might fail for “the wrong kinds of reasons.” For example, if A learns that A will be tarred and feathered by militant PETA members if A asserts “Braised rabbit is delicious,” then A would probably refrain from asserting the sentence *for this reason alone*—even though A continues to enjoy the taste of braised rabbit. I discuss such cases in §3 below.

We need not posit that A or B has a cognitive or linguistic defect in order to explain Faultlessness Analogue or Disagreement Analogue.

The three components of FD-Shape are, explicitly, facts about *our intuitions* about D. (I will assume that relevant intuitions are fairly homogeneous, but see the disclaimers in §3, wherein I also address “wrong kinds of reasons” types of worries surrounding the conditions under which speakers would refrain from making certain utterances.)

According to Competence Constraint, we presume that A and B display no logical or linguistic incompetence in their speech acts in D. Faultlessness Analogue and Disagreement Analogue, meanwhile, reflect intuitions about how A and B would respond to additional information introduced in the context of D. Faultlessness Analogue is intended to capture the intuition that both disputants’ claims are *empirically robust*—that no additional evidence would have dissuaded either speaker from saying what he did—which, as discussed, is central to relativists’ articulations of “faultlessness.”

Disagreement Analogue, meanwhile, expands upon the elaboration of the disagreement explanandum in the preceding section.

Since it is merely reflects our intuitive expectations, FD-Shape might seem quite weak. Nevertheless, I maintain that the condition suffices to distinguish cases of interest, such as stereotypical objectively-framed taste disputes, from disputes that exemplify Contradiction Shape but do *not* seem to present special challenges to semantics. FD-Shape, in other words, it appears sufficient to differentiate the former allegedly semantically interesting cases from both stereotypical factual disputes and cases of speakers merely “talking past” one another. It is important to keep in mind here that my goal is *not* to provide an analysis of what it is for a dispute to be an instance of “faultless

disagreement.” My goal is simply to isolate some common ground between the way in which the explananda have been conceived by relativists and other parties to the debates in philosophy of language—the intuitions invoked in “semanticizing” the problem—and a way in which the explananda could be conceived that is compatible with another level of explanation, such as the rhetorical/pragmatic explanation that I present in Chapter 2. FD-Shape, I believe, provides such common ground.

First, Faultlessness Analogue is intended to capture the intuition that both disputants’ claims are *robust in the face of evidence*—that knowledge of no additional facts would have dissuaded either speaker from saying what he did—which, as discussed in §1.3, seems central to common developments of the “faultlessness” explanandum. This condition differentiates FD-Shaped disputes from stereotypical factual disputes, which do not manifest Faultlessness Analogue. Suppose that A and B express incompatible beliefs by their respective utterances, only one asserts a true belief, and both assert what they do in sincere attempts to describe what is the case. Given the latter goal, it seems that neither speaker would have said what he did if he had held good evidence that it was false. Thus, if the fact under dispute is knowable, there *is* information that would have dissuaded either A or B from uttering what he actually did—since, by assumption, one is wrong and the negation of what he asserts is itself knowable information. And, even if the fact under dispute is not knowable, there is presumably information that could have convinced A or B that they lack adequate justification to assert what they did (e.g. evidence of impossibility of knowing the fact under dispute). In either case, Faultlessness Analogue fails. Finally, if both A and B *were* disposed to assert their respective claims regardless of

the available information, we would probably conclude that one of them—the one who is *wrong*—suffers some defect of reasoning or ignorance of the language he speaks (e.g. he reasons incorrectly from the information presented to him or lacks the linguistic competence to express his beliefs), in violation of Competence Constraint.

Secondly, Disagreement Analogue is meant to capture the intuition that—unlike our examples (5), (6), and (7), paradigmatic cases in which speakers seem to talk past one another—Contradiction Shape does not arise merely due to ignorance on the part of the respondent. Notice that, although Contradiction Shape holds in (5), (6), and (7), Disagreement Analogue does *not*. This is because we assume that there *is* additional information that, if known to B, would have prevented B's invoking Contradiction Shape.¹⁶ In contrast, in cases like (1), (2), and (3), it seems that we cannot impute Contradiction Shape to the respondent's ignorance: in each case, it *does* seem likely that no information would have prevented the respondent's invoking Contradiction Shape. This entails that Disagreement Analogue holds of these cases—unlike cases in which, intuitively, two speakers should be regarded (and would regard themselves) as talking past one another, as *merely failing to notice* that their ostensibly contradictory claims are indeed consistent.

By design, the definition of FD-Shape says nothing about *truth* or *contradiction*.

¹⁶ Notice that certain assumptions about the conversational goals of B are crucial to the status of some of these examples—especially, perhaps, (7)—as examples of the *failure* of Disagreement Analogue. (If B had decided that, instead of commenting on the demeanor of other customers, he would rather taunt A for his American dialect, the same information might *not* have precluded Contradiction Shape; cf. the 'biscuit' example, (21), mentioned in Chapter 3.)

Nonetheless, for the reasons given above, it can serve the role of differentiating objectively-framed taste disputes (and other disputes that possess it) from both stereotypical factual disagreements and cases of speakers' "talking past" one another. As such, moreover, it is a feature of objectively-framed taste disputes that demands explanation even prior to and independently of specifically semantic worries.

I will henceforth assume that FD-Shape provides a precisification of "faultless disagreement" that is sufficient to render certain canonical examples thereof, such as many objectively-framed taste disputes, interesting and problematic from a semantic standpoint—and will use FD-Shape as a proxy for the latter notion. In §4, I will present an argument from FD-Shape to semantic relativism. First, however, a few caveats concerning FD-Shape shape are in order; although I believe that this notion is a useful tool in diagnosing where the relativists' argument misfires, it is important not to overstate the importance of FD-Shape as a characterization of objectively-framed taste disputes. In particular, I do not mean to claim that *all* disputes about taste manifest FD-Shape—nor, as explained below, do I need to.

3. Disclaimers Concerning the Scope of FD-Shape in Taste Disputes

I assume it to be common ground between me and the relativists that *at least some* objectively-framed taste disputes possess FD-Shape. Meanwhile, however, I allow that some objectively-framed taste disputes might *not* possess FD-Shape. I discuss two sorts of cases below.

First, as one ventures farther from informal small-talk exchanges like (1), (2), and

(3) and closer to serious aesthetic disputes—as philosophers, being philosophers, might do—one might be less likely to intuit that both disputants are disposed to maintain their stances irrespective of the information available to them. Suppose, for example, that Peter and his host are debating the merits of a certain Austrian wine: Peter says “This wine is delicious,” and his host replies “No, it is not.” (This example is inspired by Railton 2000, p. 53.) Additionally suppose that, in saying what he does, Peter takes himself to commit to the claim that “those who are able to discriminate the features that make for goodness in taste will find them in this wine” (p. 61). Finally, assume that he is *wrong* about this latter claim: wine experts, in fact, would not regard the Austrian wine as an especially good wine. Given these assumptions, it seems that there *is* information—information about the opinions of wine experts—that *would have* lead Peter not to assert that the wine is delicious. But this entails that Faultlessness Analogue, and thus FD-Shape, does not hold of the dispute between Peter and his host.

To generalize: if we have the intuition that participants in a taste dispute would find their disagreement to be settled (or dissolved) by consulting certain experts, or by taking a survey of consumer opinion, or by any other empirical means, then the dispute is simply not a case of FD-Shape—nor would it seem, intuitively, to be a case of “faultless” disagreement. For that matter, if we have the intuition that a dispute would be settled on the basis of philosophical theorizing, the dispute would also not be a case of FD-Shape. Note that we might have this intuition because we believe that further inquiry would lead to the conclusion that either A or B is determinately right—or because we believe the disputants are disposed to accept that there is no genuine disagreement between them

(thereby undermining Contradiction Shape).¹⁷ As I take it, however, the point that the relativists have called to our attention is precisely that *some taste disputes are not like these*. Some taste disputes possess FD-Shape. Readers who lack the requisite intuitions even for casual, relatively “low-brow” exchanges like (1), (2), and (3) are simply not addressed by the present (and following) chapter—but, then again, such readers would also be unlikely to be persuaded by the relativists’ arguments that taste disputes are “faultless.” The intuitions that underlie FD-Shape in such dialogues compose a piece of common ground shared between me and the relativist; thus, I will henceforth take for granted that *not all* taste disputes share the responsiveness to evidence that Railton imagines in the wine-tasting case. This lack of responsiveness to new information, which is captured by my FD-Shape, is the key datum that the relativists and I agree stands in need of explanation.

A second disclaimer—which might seem pressing even to those who take “faultless disagreement” seriously—is that FD-Shape is not a *necessary* condition on seemingly “faultless” disagreements. Faultlessness Analogue and Disagreement Analogue can fail for many reasons—and, in some cases, this does not seem to undermine the intuition that disputants “disagree faultlessly” *in some sense*. For one, Faultlessness Analogue may fail in an objectively-framed taste dispute when we predict that one of the disputants would have refrained from asserting his taste claim *if only he had been made aware of certain practical concerns*. Imagine, for example, that Andy is

¹⁷ Some philosophers might hold the latter view about objectively-framed taste disputes; cf. Stojanovic (2007, pp. 694-695, 699), and Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, pp. 117ff).

socially ostracized after saying “Justin Bieber is cool” in front of his peers; if Andy had known that ostracism would result, then he probably would *not* have uttered “Justin Bieber is cool” in the context in which he did. Analogous problems arise with respect to Disagreement Analogue. For instance, suppose that DMG721, in (1), does not realize that bs13690 is a potential romantic interest, and that he will offend her if he directly denies her post. If he had been aware of these facts, then it is likely that he would *not* have denied her post of “Pie is tasty.” In this scenario, Disagreement Analogue fails—but this probably does not undermine our intuition that DMG721 contradicts bs13690.¹⁸

Additionally, there are situations in which a speaker’s information state actually influences what that speaker is disposed to find pleasurable and displeasurable. If certain speakers had known that their beer was flavored with balsamic vinegar, for example, or that the “sausages” they ate were actually composed of a vegetarian meat substitute, then these speakers would most likely would not have *enjoyed* their goods—and thus would not have uttered “This is tasty.” Absent such knowledge, however, these same speakers

¹⁸ One might wonder if one can avoid such cases by reformulating the definitions of ‘Faultlessness Analogue’ and ‘Disagreement Analogue’ in terms of *evidence* rather than *information*. (William Taschek has pressed this point in personal communication.) While this might circumvent *some* such potential failures of FD-Shape, however, it would not prevent *all*. It also introduces the new complication: what counts as “evidence” for the truth or falsity of a taste sentence? To avoid commitment, we might expand the scope to “information plausibly construed as evidence,” but here we see the reemergence of “wrong kinds of reasons” cases. For example: something plausibly construed as evidence, on many views, might be information about the preferences of those who are esteemed as culinary experts (or experts about art, music, literature, or the other domain in question). But it is easy to imagine a speaker reasoning as follows: “I enjoy X, but the experts do not enjoy X. Thus, if I express my enjoyment of X, others will think that I am uncultured; they might scoff at my poor tastes. Therefore, I must refrain from expressing my enjoyment of X.” This seems as much as “wrong kind of reason” as the example provided in the text above; indeed, it seems structurally of-a-piece.

might have enjoyed their beer and “sausages” (and said, sincerely, “This is tasty”).¹⁹ Due to this effect of information on speakers’ tastes themselves, it seems that Faultlessness Analogue would be likely to fail in certain disputes about the tastiness of the beer or vegetarian sausage. Yet this would probably not make us less inclined to regard these disputes as “faultless” in some way that factual disputes typically are *not*.

I do not believe, however, that the above worries threaten my basic project. First, as stressed, I am not attempting analyze the concept of *faultless disagreement*—merely to provide a semantically neutral description of the explananda that would be acceptable to relativists and, given certain of their background assumptions, motivate their semantic arguments. We have seen that Faultlessness Analogue does seem to closely mirror elucidations of the “faultlessness” explanandum posed by prominent theorists. Moreover, although Disagreement Analogue is less close to standard interpretations of “disagreement” (since the more typical precisification is just that the propositions expressed by the speakers’ utterances contradict one another), it seems to be a natural formulation of the explanandum in terms of the non-semantic features behind the post-theoretical intuition of contradiction. Meanwhile, scenarios like those described above remain unanalyzed in the literature on disputes of taste; thus, it is not certain how relativists would employ them to motivate their arguments. (Perhaps the response would be this: “Why would we use these deviant scenarios to motivate our view, when we can

¹⁹ For experimental data concerning the effect of information of this very sort, see, respectively, Lee, Frederick, and Ariely (2006) and Allen, Gupta, and Monnier (2008). Apparently, knowledge of the ingredients of the items that the subjects consumed did indeed influence whether the subjects found these items to taste good.

rely upon common and familiar non-deviant scenarios?”)

Finally, while I will demonstrate in §4 that (given common assumptions about the norms governing disputes) Faultlessness Analogue can be employed rather straightforwardly to argue for the need to postulate *mutual truth*—and Disagreement Analogue to argue for the need to postulate *contradiction*—it is not clear that *whatever else* underlies our intuitions of faultlessness and disagreement in objectively-framed taste disputes is the right sort of thing to motivate these semantic conclusions. After all, as stressed in §1, the mere intuition that the speakers *disagree* is not sufficient to motivate the conclusion that the speakers *contradict* one another—nor is the mere intuition that two speakers are *faultless* sufficient to motivate the conclusion that both speak *truly*.

4. From FD-Shape to Relativism

It must be granted, then, that not all disputes about taste manifest FD-Shape. It is a crucial datum, however, that disputes about taste apparently *can* manifest FD-Shape. If we assume that both disputants aim at truth in their respective speech acts, then the conjunction of Faultlessness Analogue and Competence Constraint does seem to entail that both disputants speak truly; otherwise, Faultlessness Analogue should fail (since the speaker who asserts a false proposition would be disposed to recognize, given certain information, that his utterance is false and therefore that he should not assert it).

Moreover, the conjunction of Disagreement Analogue and Competence Constraint seems to entail that the disputants contradict one another—unless there are other conditions under which Contradiction Shape is licensed. We can make this argument a bit sharper.

I submit that the conclusion of the relativists' argument against traditional semantics follows from FD-Shape given the presupposition that A and B take themselves to obey *Truth Norm* and *Contradiction Norm*:

Truth Norm

Assert sentence *S* only if *S* expresses a true proposition.

Contradiction Norm

Induce Contradiction Shape in using sentence *S* to reply to sentence *R* only if *S* and *R* express contradictory propositions.

This presupposition, I assume, is shared by most if not all parties to the debate. Granted, I have not seen it explicitly argued that speakers in objectively-framed taste disputes do obey Truth Norm and Contradiction Norm; tellingly, though, it has seldom been considered that they might *not*.²⁰

If we assume FD-Shape, Truth Norm, and Contradiction Norm, we can recast the now familiar argument against traditional (non-relativistic) semantics. The argument would run as follows:

Assume that either A or B asserts a false proposition *p*. Suppose (without loss of generality) that A does. Note that, for the purposes of the dialectic, we may assume that $\sim p$ is knowable (since no parties have expressed willingness to commit to unknowable taste facts). If $\sim p$ is knowable, then there is information (e.g. the information that $\sim p$)

²⁰ Sundell (2011) argues against something similar to Contradiction Norm, and the norm is implicitly rejected—or modified—according to “metacontextual” views on which participants in objectively-framed taste disputes implicitly negotiate what standards of taste should govern the application of the predicates in use (described in, e.g., Lasersohn 2005 and MacFarlane 2014). (In Chapter 4, however, I will argue against such “negotiation” views as adequately generalizable explanations.) I am aware of no theorist who seriously addresses the idea that the disputants violate Truth Norm.

such that, if A had possessed this information prior to making his utterance, A would have recognized that the sentence he actually utters is false—and, thus, that to assert it would be to violate Truth Norm. Thus, A would not have uttered what he actually did. (Note that if A did *not* refrain from his utterance, despite possessing the information that it is false, and despite holding himself to Truth Norm, then A would seem incompetent; thus, Competence Constraint would be in violation.) Thus, given Competence Constraint and Truth Norm, Faultlessness Analogue fails: it seems necessary, given our assumptions, that there *is* information such that, if A had possessed it, A would have not have uttered what he actually did. Therefore, given FD-Shape, A and B must both assert true (and, *a fortiori*, consistent) propositions.

But assume that speaker A and B both assert true propositions. If these propositions are both knowable, then there is information such that, if B had possessed this information prior to making his reply to A's utterance, B would have recognized that the sentence that A utters is true (in A's context). (Specifically, considering examples like (5), (6), and (7), the relevant information is information about, for example, what A *means* or information about A's context.) *A fortiori*, B would have recognized that the sentence that he actually utters does not contradict A's. Hence, on pain of violating Contradiction Norm, B would not have responded to A in a way that induces Contradiction Shape (again on pain of violating Competence Constraint). But this implies that Disagreement Analogue fails. Thus, given that FD-Shape obtains, A and B cannot both assert true propositions—but this leaves traditional logic and semantics with no option! The relativist would conclude at this point that, given FD-Shape (and Truth Norm

and Contradiction Norm), it must be that some pairs of utterances—here, in particular, utterances of objectively-framed taste sentences can express mutually true and jointly inconsistent propositions.

Relativists affirm that participants in objectively-framed taste disputes strive to obey Truth Norm and Contradiction Norm—and thus reject invariantism and speaker-indexical contextualism. I suggest instead that we abandon the assumption that the disputants hold themselves to these norms.

In Chapter 2, I provide a positive account of the allegedly troubling features of objectively framed taste disputes identified in this chapter, which blocks the relativists' argument by maintaining that speakers rationally violate Truth Norm or Contradiction Norm. Then, in Chapter 3, I demonstrate that FD-Shape is not limited to disputes involving the use of predicates of personal taste—and, in Chapter 4, I show that the account of Chapter 2 generalizes to these other instances of FD-Shape.

Chapter 2: “Feigning Objectivity” in Taste Disputes

As discussed in Chapter 1, certain disputes involving ascriptions of ‘fun’, ‘tasty’, and other predicates of personal taste have been alleged to pose problems for traditional truth-conditional semantics. Most famously, relativists have argued that traditional views cannot accommodate the intuition that the disputants *disagree* even though *neither is mistaken*. In Chapter 1, I sought to excavate the intuitions behind the characterization of “faultless disagreement” in objectively-framed disputes about taste as *contradiction despite mutual truth*. In the present chapter, I will argue that a charitable account of the underlying characteristics that we have uncovered—which I have codified as FD-Shape—demand neither contradiction nor mutual truth. More strongly, the disagreement data alone fail even to rule out either of the two of the most simplistic traditional semantic accounts of predicates of personal taste: invariantism and speaker-indexical contextualism. Thus, by themselves, these data fail to motivate relativism or any other particular semantic account. I contend that, instead, the apparently problematic data merit explanation at the level of pragmatics or rhetoric.

In formulating my response to the “semanticization” of problems raised by objectively-framed taste disputes, I employ the machinery—FD-Shape—introduced in Chapter 1. Recall that FD-Shape was designed to describe the allegedly troublesome features of the disagreement data in a way that captures the basic intuitions behind the

relativists' arguments while retaining relative semantic neutrality. Recall also that, at the end of Chapter 1, I reframed the standard relativist argument in terms of FD-Shape and two commonly presupposed conversational norms: Truth Norm and Contradiction Norm. In this chapter, I proceed to argue that participants in stereotypical disputes about taste *violate* the conversational norms in question—but that, at the same time, these violations are rhetorically effective in the contexts typical of disputes about matters of taste and, therefore, they are reasonable conversational strategies. Against the relativists, I conclude that traditional semantic accounts of predicates of personal taste, although alone insufficient to explain the disagreement data, are compatible with a viable pragmatic explanation thereof.

1. Two Conservative Positions

The alleged problem, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter, is that standard semantic views of predicates of personal taste cannot simultaneously accommodate contradiction and mutual truth. To provide a more specific illustration of this problem for traditional truth-conditional semantics, let us consider two semantically conservative positions on the sentences used in objectively-framed taste disputes: *speaker-indexical contextualism* and *invariantism* (as described below).

Philosophers and linguists commonly treat these views as stalking horses in the context of motivating more sophisticated semantics of predicates of personal taste,

whether relativism, more flexible versions of contextualism, or otherwise.²¹ I do not mean to endorse either of these simplistic views as the correct semantics of these predicates; what I wish to stress in this chapter is that *even they* are compatible with my account of objectively-framed taste disputes as “feigned” objectivity. This, I take it, is not an endorsement of the simplistic semantic accounts so much as a demonstration of the power of the rhetorical/pragmatic account that I offer. If the disagreement data are compatible with even the two positions described below, so much the worse for semantic arguments from the disagreement data.

Speaker-indexical contextualism is the view that ‘tasty’ or ‘fun’, as used by participants in an objectively-framed taste dispute, are semantically equivalent to ‘tasty to me’ or ‘fun for me’ (and likewise for other predicates of personal taste). Thus, for example, when bs13690 says “Pie is tasty,” bs13690 expresses the proposition that pie is tasty *to bs13690*, and when DMG721 says “Pie is tasty,” DMG721 expresses the proposition that pie is tasty *to DMG721*. Speaker-indexical contextualism can thereby secure mutual truth; it does not, however, predict that the disputants contradict one another—since propositions like *pie is tasty to bs13690* and *pie is tasty to DMG721* are consistent.

Invariantism, as I will discuss it here, is the view that the respondent in an objectively-framed taste dispute denies the same proposition as that asserted by the initial speaker. (Note that, as I use it, ‘invariantism’ refers specifically to a view about the

²¹ The relativist arguments were reconstructed in Chapter 1. On the contextualist side, cf., e.g., Glanzberg (2007), Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009), and Schaffer (2011).

content of two tokens of an objectively-framed taste sentences *occurring in one of our disputes of interest*.) Moreover, within the traditional truth-conditional semantic framework, this proposition takes its truth-value relative only to a world (or perhaps a world and time)—and not, for instance, relative to a judge or standard. There are many possible versions of invariantism. An invariantist might hold, for example, that both disputants’ utterances of (say) “Pie is tasty” have the same truth conditions as “Pie tastes good to the majority of human beings with non-defective taste receptors,” “Pie tastes good to the gastronomic authorities,” or even “Pie tastes good to us” (where the scope of ‘us’ includes both A and B). Indeed, a view on which both A and B use “Vegemite is tasty” to express that *Vegemite is tasty to A* (or that *Vegemite is tasty to B*) would also count as a type of invariantism on my use of the term. What is distinctive of this general semantic thesis is simply the claim that the sentence used in an objectively-framed taste dispute expresses the *same* proposition as it is used by *both* disputants. Those persuaded by the argument rehearsed in Chapter 1 can charge any such position with the same shortcoming: although the view secures *contradiction*, it predicts that one speaker asserts a *false* proposition—and thus cannot account for the what relativists have taken to be the relevant sense of faultlessness.

It is true that speaker-indexical contextualism predicts that the two speakers in an objectively-framed taste dispute do not assert contradictory propositions; I believe, however, that this is compatible with Disagreement Analogue (and Competence Constraint). And it true that invariantism predicts that one of the speakers in an objectively-framed taste dispute asserts a false proposition—but I contend that this is

compatible with Faultlessness Analogue (and Competence Constraint). On my view, there is no need to posit *contradiction* to accommodate the relevant sense of disagreement, nor *mutual truth* to accommodate faultlessness; thus, speaker-indexical contextualism cannot be dismissed for entailing that the disputants do not express contradictory propositions, nor can invariantism be rejected for entailing that one disputant assert a false proposition. The link in the relativist's argument—as reconstructed in Chapter 1—that I reject is the assumption that participants in objectively-framed taste disputes honor *Truth Norm* and *Contradiction Norm*. If we accept instead that disputants *rationaly violate* these norms in the context of these disputes, as I believe we should, we can account for FD-Shape without rejecting even these most basic traditional semantic views; if the latter views are to be rejected, it must be on other grounds. *A fortiori*, we can account for FD-Shape without accepting a radical semantic proposal such as relativism.

2. Towards a Socio-Pragmatic Explanation of FD-Shape

I maintain that speakers in stereotypical objectively-framed taste disputes violate Truth Norm or Contradiction Norm. I further maintain, however, that this violation is rhetorically effective, given the conversational aims of the disputants, and thereby rational. Indeed, I claim that it is precisely because violations of these norms are reasonable in the contexts of such disputes that FD-Shape can obtain.

In developing a socio-pragmatic account of disputes about matters of taste, I first refocus the explananda in terms of FD-Shape—stressing, as other philosophers have

observed, that speakers follow a practice of applying predicates of personal taste only if they recognize themselves to be disposed to experience certain affective responses to objects of evaluation. Although this practice explains Faultlessness Analogue, it does not account for Disagreement Analogue (§2.1). The first step to completing the explanation of FD-Shape is to notice—as has often been ignored in philosophical discussion—that a familiar folk theory of taste discourse suggests that speakers in objectively-framed taste disputes violate either Truth Norm or Contradiction Norm (§2.2). The thesis that speakers violate one of these norms—and, moreover, do so willfully and rationally—garners further support from observation of clear cases in which speakers flout Truth Norm. In particular, I call attention to the use of exaggeration or hyperbole in taste discourse (§2.3)—and thereupon note that, like hyperbole, the use of the objective frame in taste discourse has been identified as an *intensifier* (§2.4). Finally, I propose that these strands can be reconciled by treating the objective-framing of taste disputes as itself a trope: syntactic features like Contradiction Shape are evocative of factual disagreements—and this suggestion, even if inaccurate, is rhetorically effective insofar as it lends emphasis or intensity to speakers’ expressions of taste (§2.5).

2.1 Refocusing the Explananda

Let us begin by noting that, in light of common pre-theoretic conceptions of taste discourse, Faultlessness Analogue is nothing too mysterious. Indeed, philosophers have already noted that speakers follow a practice of ascribing predicates of personal taste only if *they themselves* experience (or are disposed to experience) a certain appropriate

affective response to the subject of evaluation. MacFarlane, for example, argues that speakers follow the rule “If you know first-hand how something tastes, call it ‘tasty’ just in case its flavor is pleasing to you, and ‘not tasty’ just in case its flavor is not pleasing to you” (2014, p. 4). Wright similarly suggests that the assertibility conditions for taste claims are “given by a subject’s finding herself in a certain type of non-cognitive affective state,” such as liking the taste of the object of assessment (in the case of ‘delicious’) (2006, p. 57). Support for such theses comes from reflection on the conditions under which speakers who utter taste sentences are assessable as *justified* or *sincere*. Typically, one would seem unjustified in ascribing ‘tasty’ to a food that one hasn’t tasted, and one would seem insincere in applying ‘tasty’ to a food whose taste one detests.²² (Analogous observations apply to ‘fun’ and other predicates of personal taste.) This fact about taste discourse goes some way toward explaining Faultlessness Analogue: if a speaker’s license for uttering taste sentences depends solely on her sensory and affective states, then it seems likely that no new information would affect what taste claims she is prepared to make.²³

I believe that the more interesting question is why Disagreement Analogue obtains despite Faultlessness Analogue. If B is familiar with the preceding practice—as he presumably is—why would B reply to A’s taste claim in a way that induces

²² See, e.g., MacFarlane (2014), Lasersohn (2005), and Egan (2010) for arguments for speaker-centric assertibility conditions of taste sentences based on similar evidence.

²³ Note also that, when considering stereotypical taste disputes, we tend not to imagine scenarios in which a speaker’s epistemic state influences her willingness to express her tastes—let alone her sensory or affective responses themselves (cf. the “deviant” scenarios glossed in Chapter 1, §3).

Contradiction Shape? Why would B not conclude that, due to differences between their personal preferences, B's claim is consistent with that of A—and that, because of this, it would be infelicitous to reply with a direct denial? (This is, after all, the type of reaction that we would expect from speakers in exchanges like (5), (6), and (7).)

My claim is that Contradiction Shape may be employed in such contexts for rhetorical effect—whether or not the content of B's utterance contradicts that of A's. Most theorists, in contrast, would explain Disagreement Analogue by positing shared content over which A and B disagree. One trouble with this strategy, however, is that it conflicts with an entrenched folk theory that informs speakers that “taste is subjective” and “there's no disputing taste.” It is to this folk theory that I now turn.

2.2 There's No Disputing the Folk Theory of Taste Discourse

Although the point is often ignored in philosophical discussions of disputes about taste, a well-known folk theory of taste-talk seems clearly to vindicate the claim that speakers in objectively-framed taste disputes violate Truth Norm or Contradiction Norm.

In modern American society, at least, speakers are taught to distinguish sentences stating “opinions” from those stating “facts,” where objectively-framed taste sentences are often accepted as paradigms of the former. In this folk taxonomy, matters of opinion are often assumed to be topics about which there simply is no matter of fact. Mere opinions, it is often supposed, are not strictly true or false. This is, in any case, what I learned during my elementary school education—but I doubt that my classmates and I are alone. A quick search, for example, reveals an on-line lesson designed to teach students

to distinguish between “facts” and “opinions.” The lesson states that statements of fact “may be true or false” and “can be *proven*” (emphasis in original), while statements of opinion, like “Golf is boring” and “Pizza is delicious” (to use examples from the lesson), “cannot be proven.”²⁴

An important datum here—directly relevant to our present topic—is that speakers often do *not* use a direct denial in replying to an objectively-framed taste sentence that they would not themselves assert. It is felicitous—and indeed common—for speakers to issue replies like “That’s just your opinion,” and to remind speakers with differing tastes that taste is “subjective” (perhaps by reciting clichés like “To each his own,” “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” or “There’s no disputing taste”). Slightly less overtly, a speaker might remind an interlocutor of the subjectivity of taste simply by adopting the subjective frame himself (e.g. “Well, *I* don’t like it” or “It takes good *to me*”). Indeed, examples of such tactics appear in the exchanges from which our paradigm objectively-framed taste disputes were drawn. Take, for instance, the following reply to rYokucHa’s initial post in (2):

OziGirl_:

If you have not been brought up on it [Vegemite], I could see why you probably would not like it but for those that have had it since they were young, it is nice.

Some even more direct examples emerge in the conversation following (3):

BloodBurger:

Nothing wrong with the consumer expressing his or her dissatisfaction with the product they bought. Its his opinion and many of us share it. We’re kind of

²⁴ “Fact and Opinion: How to Tell the Difference,” E Reading Worksheets, accessed May 3, 2013, < <http://www.ereadingworksheets.com/reading-worksheets/fact-and-opinion.htm>>.

entitled to that.

Tyggs:

That's your opinion and you're entitled to it, but it's just that: An opinion.

Satyricon:

Fun is relative, I find it fun. Sucks to be you.

I presume, in fact, that most speakers would agree that the disputants in (1), (2), and (3) are not really arguing about *facts* that one party has right and the other has wrong; the speakers are expressing contrary *opinions*—and only that. (Let us grant that, as Satyricon's comment exemplifies, speakers hold this view at the same time as treating their own opinions as superior to those of others—a point to which I will return below.)

If we take this folk theory at face value, it provides us with at least *prima facie* ramifications for the semantics of the sentences used in objectively-framed taste disputes. One possible conclusion is that there are no objective taste facts. A theorist might take this conclusion to recommend an error theory for objectively-framed taste sentences—according to which such sentences are systematically false or truth-valueless, and thus speakers in objectively-framed taste disputes violate Truth Norm. Another possible conclusion, which also seems compatible with the folk theory (and which neatly accords with the explanation of Faultlessness Analogue in §2.1), is that speakers in objectively-framed taste disputes assert consistent propositions about their own respective tastes. In this case, though, they would violate Contradiction Norm when they engage in these disputes.

The above reflections suggest that Truth Norm or Contradiction Norm *is violated* in our disputes of interest. For all that I have argued so far, however, it remains possible

that speakers' dispositions to persist in such violations mark *failures* of reasoning or language use. This, though, is not my conclusion; crucially, I claim that these violations are indeed *rational*. In what follows, I support the latter claim by drawing an analogy to other violations of these norms—specifically, Truth Norm—that occur in the same contexts in which objectively-framed taste disputes arise. These widely recognized practices of violating Truth Norm, such as the use of hyperbole, have endured because their rhetorical value often befits the conversational aims of the disputants.

2.3 Taste Discourse and Overstatement

Speakers—including those engaged in taste-talk—often *willfully* violate norms, such as Truth Norm, that govern the transmission of accurate information. Granted, some instances thereof are apparently irrelevant to our present topic: lying, pretense, irony, and sarcasm, for example, all appear to be bad analogies—since the speakers in disputes like (1), (2), and (3) are presumably at least *sincere* in their expressions of personal taste. I submit, however, that one rhetorical device worthy of our attention is *hyperbole* (or *exaggeration* or *overstatement*—if these are distinct). I will not presently attempt to define what hyperbole *is*, nor to explain the mechanisms by which it achieves its effect.²⁵ Instead, I simply call attention to uncontested examples that arise in the context of taste disputes.

Among the most familiar examples of hyperbolic statements are what are

²⁵ For overviews, see McCarthy and Carter (2004) and Claridge (2011).

sometimes called *extreme case formulations*.²⁶ These include sentences like (to take an example from taste discourse) “That’s the best meal I’ve had in my entire life!” Such a sentence can be felicitously used to express strong praise of a meal—even if the speaker recalls that she has, in fact, consumed a meal that she enjoyed more. Another example emerges in the thread following (3):

Oorgle:
Everyone loved diablo 2...

Presumably, Oorgle recognizes that some people did *not* love Diablo 2. Note that this is so even if the domain of the quantifier is restricted to, say, gamers or forum members—since Oorgle can learn from *other forum posts* that some players disliked the game. Nevertheless, it is conversationally acceptable for Oorgle to exaggerate in order to emphasize what he perceives (as I take it) as egregious backsliding in the quality of the Diablo games.

Other cases of hyperbole, which also appear in taste disputes, involve exaggerated comparisons. No doubt, for example, the reader has heard expressions of the form “X tastes like shit” (and perhaps even called attention to the absurdity of the literal content by replying “I don’t even want to know why you know what shit tastes like”). And it is easy to imagine a speaker uttering something like “I’d rather gouge out my own eyes than play Diablo 3” even if she knows that, in fact, she would choose Diablo 3 over eye-gouging if actually presented with the choice. Similarly, in the thread following (3), we find this example:

²⁶ Cf. Pomerantz (1986).

Confucianism:

I would say staring at a brick wall is more fun than playing d3 but I can't tell the difference.

It is, again, presumably false that Confucianism cannot distinguish between playing Diablo 3 and staring at a brick wall. Through his patently false utterance, however, Confucianism successfully expresses his extreme displeasure in the game.

There is one last rhetorical strategy sometimes adopted in taste disputes to which I want to call particular attention—which is plausibly also a type of exaggeration or overstatement—and this is the technique of framing those who differ in their tastes as *defective*. Recall rYokucHa, the initial poster in (2), who asks “Why do some people eat vegemite? ... Why is this nonsense? Are they mad?” In a similar vein, consider stevian1's reply:

stevian1:

[Vegemite] is Gods own spread. Anyone who thinks it is disgusting is insane, or are you one of those idiots who spreads in inches thick?

I assume that, if asked, stevian1 would deny that dislike of Vegemite is “really” sufficient to classify one as insane—nor overuse of Vegemite to classify one as idiotic.

Nonetheless, his portrayal of those who dislike Vegemite as either “insane” or “idiots” helps to convey the intensity of liking for Vegemite—in much the same way as

rYokucHa conveys her extreme *displeasure* in its taste when she portrays those who eat it as plausibly “mad.” Likewise, in everyday small-talk settings, I have witnessed many discussions of taste in which exclamations like “You're weird!” or “You're crazy!” were used when one speaker revealed either a liking for something another strongly disliked or a *disliking* for something another strongly *liked* (e.g. “You don't like dark chocolate?!

You're *crazy*").²⁷ These purported charges of “defectiveness” generally have a playful air—and are surely not serious diagnoses of psychological maladies.

In the examples in §2.3, speakers use sentences that they presumably believe to be literally false. Despite this, they are not liars—nor do they appear to be incompetent as reasoners, language-users, or even cooperative interlocutors. On the contrary, overstatement is a common and widely-accepted means of conveying emotional intensity, as Quintilian describes:

It is in common use...because there is in all men a natural propensity to magnify or extenuate what comes before them, and no one is contented with the exact truth. But such departure from the truth is pardoned because we do not affirm what is false (VIII, 6, 76).

These departures from literal truth are perhaps especially common in discussions of the often affectively-laden topic of personal tastes. Here, we might observe that much of the force of speakers' utterances could be lost if discussants *were* to aim for factually accuracy—if someone like stevian1, for example, were simply to say “I love the taste of Vegemite, and I feel very strongly about this.” Indeed, in some contexts, the failure to engage in a bit of exaggeration could come across as cold or even insincere. If one enjoys a meal, for example, one might be expected to evince one's pleasure through an exaggerated exclamation of praise; merely stating “I enjoy this,” for example, might seem suspicious—and perhaps even taken evidence *against* the proposition expressed.

2.4 The Objective Frame and Intensification

²⁷ It's worth pointing out, I think, that speakers might adopt this tactic even when their interlocutors utters a *subjectively-framed* taste claim (e.g. “I don't like dark chocolate”).

I believe that the use of overstatement in taste discourse provides an illustrative, if rough, analogy to the employment of the objective frame—which, as noted in §2.2, speakers seem to adopt despite belief that matters of taste are not really objective or factual. One significant point of analogy is that theorists, especially discursive psychologists, have identified the use of the objective frame of taste sentences—like hyperbole or overstatement—as an intensifier.

Sally Wiggins and John Potter (2003), for example, have analyzed differences in the patterns of use between objectively and subjectively framed taste sentences in recordings of dinner conversations. They argue that objectively-framed taste sentences are conversationally effective insofar as they suggest that good and bad taste qualities are “features of the food itself rather than (possibly) idiosyncratic to the speaker” (p. 519). In praising a chef, for example, “the objective evaluation presents the judgment as more than a personal one, and therefore makes a stronger compliment,” whereas subjectively-framed taste sentences may project the possibility that others might not like the food, and therefore weaken the compliment (p. 520). The authors further note that subjective phrasings, being more tentative, are useful in *avoiding* or *mitigating* conflict (cf. p. 521). In a similar vein, Petra Snejder and Hedwig F.M. te Molder (2006) examine email exchanges on a forum about food and cooking, and analyze the use of the objective form in situations in which a respondent expresses *agreement* with a previous taste claim. They conclude that the objective form presents a second speaker as more authoritative by “constructing the tastiness...as a fact rather than a privileged experience” (p. 111). To summarize, a common theme in this psychological literature is that speakers adopt the

objective frame when they wish to be particularly emphatic in expressing a taste claim—and to present themselves as having sufficient gastronomic expertise to issue such a judgement.

While the above researchers often note that objective frame is more forceful due its construction of taste as subject-independent, they do not address the issue of how to reconcile its use with the common conception of taste as *non-objective* and *subject-relative*. It would be consistent to maintain, for instance, that the disputants in our examples are simply mistaken or confused—or that they *are* arguing about the truth or falsity of certain objective taste facts, and the folk theory of taste discourse is wrong. Both proposals, however, seem grossly uncharitable. This is where my suggestion enters: when speakers adopt the syntactic features associated with objective factual disputes, they simply do not commit to the *literal accuracy* of this presentation.

2.5 Objective-Framing as a Trope

My proposal, again, is that framing taste claims—and denials thereof—*as if* matters of taste are objective is a trope that lends rhetorical force to the disputants' speech acts. This rationalizes the adoption of the objective frame even if, as the folk theory suggests, matters of taste are not really objective. There are two potential contributors to the intensity of objectively-framed taste disputes:

- First, as just discussed, the objective frame itself seems to intensify a taste claim (in comparison to the subjective frame); thus, the utterances of both speakers can be expected to inherit the intensifying effect of the objective frame *per se*.

- Second—and characteristic specifically of objectively-framed taste *disputes*—the respondent’s speech act seems to gain additional intensity through the inducement of Contradiction Shape.

The second point merits further comment. I assume that ordinary speakers, no less than theorists, are familiar with the features of Contradiction Shape through their presence in paradigmatic factual disputes. By invoking them, therefore, the respondent effectively frames the initial speaker as wrong about a matter of fact; he thereby presents the initial speaker as ignorant, irrational, or otherwise bad at detecting an objective taste property. It is interesting here to recall the tactic, discussed in §2.3, of framing speakers with different tastes as though they are afflicted with madness, idiocy, or other psychological defects. I submit that invoking Contradiction Shape in rejecting a taste claim—rather than, say, retreating to an explicitly subjective formulation—is roughly akin to the strategy of framing an interlocutor with different preferences as “defective.” By casting the initial speaker as mistaken about the facts, instead of simply different in her opinions, the respondent conveys a stronger criticism of that speaker’s tastes—and a stronger commitment to the “superiority” of the respondent’s tastes—than that which would be produced by a subjective-framed reply such as “That’s just your opinion; I don’t like it myself.”

The present philosophical debates rest on the assumption that speakers in taste disputes take themselves to obey the same norms that govern paradigmatic factual disputes—in which the efficient and accurate exchange of information is the paramount goal. In the latter disputes, arguably, speakers *should* strive to obey Truth Norm and

Contradiction Norm. But additional concerns, such as the desire to express emotional intensity, often impinge on speakers in the conversational contexts in which objectively-framed taste disputes arise. These additional concerns rationalize speakers in employing rhetorical devices such as hyperbole. Similarly, I suggest, the adoption of the objective frame and Contradiction Shape yields rhetorical force to speakers' taste claims—an effect that likely owes to the association of this syntactic structure with “disputes about the facts.” This rhetorical effect persists despite—and, perhaps, *because of*—a lack of literal accuracy in the framing of the dispute. It appears, finally, that the inaccuracies incurred in objectively-framed taste disputes facilitate important conversational goals such as the making plain of speakers' own preferences, and the strength of their commitment to these preferences, and expressing evaluations of *others* in virtue of *their* tastes.²⁸

So here, at last, is my proposed explanation of FD-Shape in disputes about taste: the disputants do not hold their utterances accountable to their literal accuracy; their utterances are thus immune to potentially countervailing evidence in much the same way as utterances like “Everyone loved Diablo 2” or “Vegemite's is God's own spread” are “immune” to the evidence that some gamers disliked Diablo 2 or that God neither manufactures nor consumes Vegemite.

²⁸ Speakers in disputes about taste might often have other goals; they might, for example, endeavor to *persuade others* to pay more attention to the enjoyable features of Diablo 3, or to play more and different video games, or to prepare Vegemite-containing dishes in a different manner, or so on. But here too tropes like hyperbole and overstatement can be apt: one way to persuade others to follow one's recommendations is first to project oneself as confident and firm in one's own preferences—thereby suggesting that one has relevant experience and authority. I discuss this further in the “afterward” §4.

3. Semantics Revisited

I hold, then, that FD-Shape is appropriately explained at the level of rhetoric or pragmatics. As such, it does not *ipso facto* demand the introduction of a revisionary semantics for predicates of personal taste. Meanwhile, however, prior attempts to rescue conservative semantic accounts of predicates of personal taste have fallen short—precisely because the common approach has been to attempt to figure out what content could be expressed by objectively-framed taste claims such that it is plausible that the disputes *really are* arguing about the truth or falsity of that content.²⁹

In this concluding section, I demonstrate that even two basic and simple-minded accounts of the semantics of objectively-framed taste sentences—speaker-indexical contextualism and “error theoretic” invariantism—are readily assimilated to the pragmatic explanation of FD-Shape advanced in §2 and thus can easily accommodate the disagreement data. Note, again, that I do not intend to endorse either account—nor to suggest that these are only two options. Certainly, I do not advocate either view as an account of the semantics of *all* objectively-framed taste sentences. (Keep in mind that this chapter, and dissertation, concerns only the particular tokens of taste sentences used in objectively-framed taste disputes—and, out of the latter, only the ones that further possess FD-Shape.)

Speaker-indexical contextualism, to recall, is the view that predicates like ‘fun’

²⁹ See, e.g., Glanzberg (2007), Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009), and Schaffer (2011). Although these authors argue persuasively for flexible contextualist accounts of predicates of personal taste, which accommodate a wide range uses of such predicates, they do not directly address the intuitions underlying faultless disagreement (or, in present terms, FD-Shape).

and ‘tasty’ (as used in objectively-framed disputes) are semantically equivalent to ‘fun for me’ and ‘tasty for me’. One possible benefit of this view, already noted in passing, is that it accords with the intuition that Faultlessness Analogue holds because speakers follow a practice of applying predicates of personal taste solely on the basis of their own sensory and affective responses to the subjects of evaluation (§2.1). But the alleged problem is that speaker-indexical contextualism cannot charitably account for the appearance that speakers in an objectively-framed taste dispute *contradict* one another. I believe that the speaker-indexical contextualist should simply reply that the respondent intentionally violates Contradiction Norm—and adopt an adjoining pragmatic account according to which the appearance of contradiction is a mere façade: although the respondent asserts a proposition that is consistent with that asserted by the initial speaker, he poses *as if* their expressed commitments were incompatible.

To lend further credibility to the claim that disputants “feign contradiction,” the speaker-indexical contextualist could stress that even uses of *subjectively-framed* taste sentences often generate a sense of tension between speakers with different tastes. Even when speakers say “I don’t like Vegemite” or “I enjoy Diablo 3 more than Diablo 2,” for example, they might find pressure on them to provide reasons or for their preferences—to describe their prior encounters with Vegemite, say, or explain *just what it is* that they find more enjoyable in Diablo 3 than Diablo 2. Indeed, the subjective frame does not even immunize speakers against the mock accusations of “madness” described in §2.3 (cf. note 24)—nor does it protect against attempts from others to “improve” one’s tastes. Given that discrepancies in taste—*however* they are expressed—often do generate such tension

between speakers, the adoption of the syntax of stereotypical disputes about the facts might be a relatively short step. In any case, subjectively-framed taste discourse demonstrates that contradiction is unnecessary for discussants to feel that there are differences between them that are worth arguing about.³⁰

A second apparently viable interpretation of the disagreement data is provided by an invariantist view on which objectively-framed taste disputes occur against a presupposition that ‘tasty’ or ‘fun’ (etc.) denotes the same determinate property on each of its uses in the dispute. Note that there is no need to subscribe to a robust realism about subject-independent taste properties in order to develop such a view. It might be plausible, for example, to accept a type of “error theory” for the semantics of objectively-framed taste sentences: unrelativized predicates of personal taste, as used in objectively-framed disputes, *purport* to denote objective taste properties—even though nothing is

³⁰ Importantly, it seems generally true that speakers can use subjectively-framed sentences like “I hate Vegemite” and “I don’t enjoy Diablo III” not only to express their personal preferences, voice praise and criticism, and explain or justify their own behavior—for example—but also to offer recommendations and advice concerning what *others might like or dislike*, to *encourage others* to try something (or not to bother with it), to *express solidarity with others* in virtue of common preferences, and to *criticize others* in virtue of their having dissimilar (and, presumably, “worse”) preferences.

It thus appears that—as a general point about taste discourse—the adoption of the objective frame facilitates conversations that could otherwise be carried out through the use of explicitly subjective sentences. In contexts of advice and recommendations, speakers might presuppose that they and their interlocutors generally share common tastes and preferences. Indeed, such a presupposition *already* seems necessary to explain the common practice of asserting facts about *one’s own* likes and dislikes for the purpose of providing recommendations to *others*. Similarly, in contexts of expressing agreement about taste claims, the use of the objective frame appears also to trigger a presupposition that the speakers are alike with their dispositions to have certain tastes and preferences. A more complete socio-pragmatic account of taste discourse would analyze these *other* functions of “feigning objectivity” as well. In this dissertation—or, at least, in the present draft thereof—I limit myself to a discussion of its apparent role in *disputes*.

really “objectively tasty,” “objectively fun,” and so forth. Presumably, on such an account, the relevant objectively-framed taste sentences would be false or truth-valueless (depending on the precise nature of the semantics that one adopts for error theories). But rather than adopt a pragmatic view on which speakers of objectively-framed taste sentences betray ignorance or incompetence, I claim that a proponent of “error-theoretic” invariantism should hold that disputants willfully violate Truth Norm: in this case, the appearance of *disputing an objective fact* is a mere façade—lending rhetorical effect.

Thus, the disagreement data *per se* fail to rule out even these two crude accounts, speaker-indexical contextualism and error-theoretic invariantism, as models of the semantics of the sentences used in objectively-framed taste disputes. The basic account of §2—that the disputants adopt a literally inaccurate framing of their dispute as a factual dispute for the sake of rhetorical effect—is compatible with both of these simple semantic views within the traditional framework. It is worth noting that, although these semantic views are apparently quite different, the fact that are both compatible with the preceding pragmatic account is perhaps not unexpected under the assumption that the objective frame is a trope. For one, tropes like hyperbole and metaphor can conventionalize and “die” (as with, perhaps, the once-metaphorical use of ‘dead’ in ‘dead metaphor’). Arguably, for example, “The meeting was intolerable” and “It went on for ages” *just mean*, respectively, that the meeting was *difficult* to endure and that it lasted *a long time*—not that it was *impossible* to endure and lasted for (geological) *ages* (cf., e.g., McCarthy and Carter 2004, p. 151). Analogously, it might be predictably difficult to decide whether an occurrence of “Pie is tasty” just means that pie is tasty *to the*

speaker—given that speakers typically *use* this sentence to convey such information—or whether it retains a literally inaccurate meaning that pie is “objectively tasty.”

Furthermore, it is worth keeping in mind that the requisite pragmatic explanation simply invokes the association of a certain syntactic shape with certain semantic and pragmatic features (that is, the association of the objective frame and Contradiction Shape with the hallmarks of “disagreement about the facts”); the explanation does not require us to invoke inferences from the content literally expressed (in contrast, for example, to the noted examples of Grice 1975). This also encourages a good degree of flexibility in a semantic account able to accommodate the disagreement data.

In conclusion, both relativists and their opponents have erred in supposing that the peculiar features of objectively-framed taste disputes, which I have here codified as FD-Shape, demand explanation at the level of semantics—rather than, as I have argued, that of pragmatics or rhetoric. Once we have developed a feasible view of the latter sort—interpreting the “objective frame” of taste disputes as a trope—we can see that the data are easily assimilated traditional truth-conditional semantics; there is no need to resort to relativism, or any other radical semantic proposal, to make sense of the appearance of “faultless disagreement” in taste discourse.

4. Afterward: A Reply to “Objectivism” about Taste

Recall the Railtonian view of aesthetics mentioned in the “disclaimer” section (§3) of Chapter 1; according to such a view, there *are* intersubjective standards of taste—standards, if you will, of “objectively” good taste. Experienced connoisseurs of food or

drink, for example, track these intersubjective standards better than the rest of us. On this view, some tastes and preferences are indeed superior to others—and, because of *this*, disputes about taste are often worthwhile. Proponents of this view are likely also to take a stand on semantics: an objectively-framed taste sentence like “*a* is beautiful” or “*a* is delicious” (or so forth) express the proposition that *a* possesses those features that make for intersubjectively good taste (in the relevant respect). It is this content, the proponent would charge, that is under debate in a (worthwhile) taste dispute.

I imagine that proponents of this view—which, out of convenience, I’ll refer to as “objectivism” about taste—might be loath to agree that, even according to the folk theory, “there is no disputing tastes.” In response to the points raised in §2.2, the objectivist about taste might point out that—in common practice—speakers *do* defer experts about “good” wine, beer, meats, cheeses, chocolates, coffee and espresso, and so forth, and that speakers trust such experts for advice and recommendations. It is worth stressing, then, that I do not deny that ordinary practice often does reveal such deference—nor do I deny that recognized “experts” about good food, drink, art, music, and so on do indeed track some sort of “genuine quality” (or the lack of it) therein.

What I *do* deny is, for one, that this *exhausts* the socially important function of taste and taste discourse. Additionally, I deny that any such “objectively good taste” of the above sort is always—or even typically—what is under dispute in stereotypical small-talk disputes about taste like our examples (1), (2), and (3). However, even to explain the practices above, there is no need to posit that the intersubjective standards of good taste have become semantically encoded as the content of objectively-framed taste sentences.

On the contrary, the idea of “feigning objectivity” fits well with a sociological, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic explanation of speakers’ practices of deferring to experts about taste—in addition to explaining *non-deferential* practices that the objectivist view seems hard-pressed to accommodate.

What the objectivist overlooks is that many *other* important social functions of taste discourse are orthogonal to the topic of “good taste.” Speakers can felicitously use objectively-framed taste sentences with indifference—or even opposition—to the preferences that would be agreed upon by experts (or survive the test of time or the like). I would conjecture that, when speakers discuss preferences in music, movies, and food with friends and acquaintances, they are often—probably more often than not—interested in what they and their companions like, or would like, in their *present* context, or perhaps in the *very near* future. There is little evidence that ordinary speakers chat about taste out of interest in what, say, their *ideal* selves—possessed of knowledge, experience, and refined sentiments—would prefer. Indeed, speakers do not always prefer to cultivate tastes and preferences that accord with those of recognized experts—as opposed to, for example, cultivating tastes that accord with those of others in their social group, or in the social group that they desire to join, or that agree with other values that they hold (e.g. moral, social, or political values). Taste-talk is more than a mere extension of aesthetic criticism.

Certainly, taste is not merely personal; taste is social. But the social role of taste is more complex and multi-faceted than mere deference to individuals with greater experience and more refined senses. As I explain in more detail below, expressing certain

tastes can project a certain persona to others; one's expressed tastes can mark one as a member of a specific social class or sub-culture (a theme with a venerable history in recent post-Bourdieu sociology), or it can token one's unique individuality (as has been studied, for instance, in recent work in behavioral economics).³¹ Meanwhile, matters of taste can often provide "safe topics" that are frequently broached in small-talk settings as a way of making conversation—and building intimacy and solidarity—while maintaining a relatively low risk of serious controversy. Indeed, I believe that even *arguments* about matters of taste can function as solidarity-building activities. As I will describe, these important functions of taste—and talking about taste—have social value independent of any concern of the interlocutors to align their own tastes and preferences with those of the "experts."

Moreover, it is important to stress that, even in these non-deferential practices, speakers use both objectively and subjectively framed taste sentences—and the choice between them seems to have conversational impact. Thus, the difference between the objective and subjective frames in these other practices also merits a theoretical account—but, here, it seems that the objectivist's postulated difference in content (as an assertion about personal preference versus an assertion about expert preferences or the like) can gain little traction.

It is worth considering some of these additional roles and functions of taste discourse in more detail. Most famously, perhaps, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argued that taste is marker of social status: individuals come to internalize the tastes and preferences

³¹ See the references in the following paragraphs.

of those in their social classes; thus, their displays of taste and culture reveal their class heritage--and this, in turn, can stultify their potential to ascend the social hierarchy, causing them to be accepted within their own class but discredited by superiors. (In his view, taste is a form of “capital,” necessary to buy one’s legitimacy within a certain class.) What is important for present purposes is simply that—to some degree—*taste tracks social affiliation*. And this, I take it, should not be a controversial claim in itself. We might further distinguish, roughly, between a vertical axis (between social classes) and a horizontal axis (between sub-groups within a social class). Bourdieu, of course, was interested in the former type of distinction; later sociologists and cultural studies scholars, influenced by Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, have extended some of his ideas to the sociology of subcultures.

Now, most likely, the distribution of taste among social classes in most contemporary industrialized countries does not look exactly like what is depicted in Bourdieu’s studies in mid/late 20th century France.³² Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny

³² Recent Anglo-American researchers have observed that exclusive consumption of “high culture” products, as opposed to “low culture” products, does not necessarily signal high socio-economic status—and that what is more salient is that higher SES individuals tend to consume a wider variety of music, art, food, and literature. See, especially, the work of Richard Peterson (e.g. Peterson and Kern 1996, Peterson 2005). Other examples include Bryson (1996), van Eijck (2001), Bennett et al (2009).

This is not to say, though, that “high-brow/low-brow” distinction is dead: modern classical music, opera, expensive wines, and Parisian fashions might retain a distinctly “high-brow” status, such that one can signal high SES *simply* by a preference for such products, while—if Bryson is right—heavy metal is enjoyed almost exclusively by lower SES individuals.

At the same time, though, most sociologists concur that taste continues to serve as an indicator of social status; it seems, however, that *what* one consumes is not as important for this purpose as *how* one chooses and evaluates what one consumes. Following

that taste has long been—and continues to be—a marker of social class. To see why taste differences are therefore socially important, it is not necessary to take a stand on whether the tastes of any certain classes are “objectively better” than the tastes of any other classes. Perhaps, to some extent, it is arbitrary what music, food, and literature comes to be preferred by which class—and, in consequence, the high-brow/low-brow distinction does not track higher and lower aesthetic value. Yet it could be that the taste of the socio-economic elite generally tends to correlate with appreciation of genuine aesthetic value. If so, this would most likely be no arbitrary connection: the wealthier and more educated classes might disproportionately favor objectively good art, literature, music, food, and drink, simply because they have the means to acquire the knowledge, experience, and refinement of sentiment that is a prerequisite to enjoyment thereof. They are better educated in the arts and humanities. They can afford to frequent museums, attend plays and symphonies, and purchase fine wine and gourmet food. They can, moreover, “fit in” in elite cultural settings: they can attain the proper attire, choose the right foods and drinks, speak in the right way, and so forth.

If the latter is true, it is surely unfortunate that the working classes are culturally and financially barred from the consumption of the best objects of enjoyment, and have instead internalized the aesthetically inferior “taste of necessity” (to use Bourdieu’s terminology)—but we should not let our sympathies for social equality lead us to accept

Bourdieu, Johnston and Baumann—in their insightful analysis of “foodie” culture—refer to the *aesthetic disposition*. (Higher status folk, for instance, tend to stress values like “authenticity” and “exoticism.” These terms come from the research of Johnston and Baumann (2007, 2009) on food discourse. For similar considerations in domains of music and art, see (for example) Holt (1997) and Bennett et al (2009).

aesthetic equality between the tastes of the upper classes and the tastes of the working classes. The point to make is that concerns *other than* aesthetics—in this case, demands for social justice and equality—could justifiably impinge on taste discourse. For example, *class consciousness* could outweigh purely aesthetic considerations in dictating what tastes individuals choose to cultivate and express.

We might develop this example a bit more precisely. Assume that the correlation discussed in the previous paragraph does exist. A consequence is that appreciation of aesthetic value has become associated with social dominance. Now consider a proletarian who wants to express solidarity with his own class, *against* the socio-economic elite. Adopting the prevailing tastes and preferences of a certain group—and rejecting those of another—provides a means to symbolically identify with the previous group and disaffiliate from the latter. Our proletarian, then, might reject the characteristic tastes of the upper classes—whatever these happen to be—due to their association with socio-economic oppression (and perhaps would do so even if provided with the opportunity to learn to appreciate fine art and food, etc.). He might be indifferent to question of whether or not the tastes are genuinely superior in a purely aesthetic sense—or, indeed, he might even come to reject the very pursuit of aesthetic value, due its association with the economically dominant classes.

It is worth stressing two specific reasons why the aforementioned proletarian might behave as he does—being disposed to willfully reject opportunities to cultivate an appreciation for aesthetic value, insofar as possessors of aesthetic value are distinctively favored by the socio-economic elite. First, it might be important to him that his tastes

align with his values. There is, surely, no inconsistency in valuing one's class consciousness more than one's desire for aesthetic pleasure. His acquiring or maintaining the tastes of the working class might be superior in view of the non-aesthetic value of social justice—functioning, as it does, as symbolic opposition to the elite—even if not in view aesthetics.³³ Secondly, the proletarian might be entirely apolitical—and yet might be moved by social pressure to align his tastes with those of other proletarians rather than those of the higher classes. He might be teased by his peers at the shop (or what have you), or perceived as “uppity,” if he begins to acquire a predilection for fine food and drink, painting, poetry, opera, or classical music. (Correspondingly, members of lower classes might flaunt their decidedly *non*-elite tastes as a means to disaffiliate themselves from the snobbish classes.) In the second case, it is the desire for social acceptance that trumps the desire for aesthetic pleasure.³⁴

There is no reason to assume that speakers in such situations would abstain from using objectively-framed taste sentences to express their preferences—or, perhaps better, those preferences that they want to be perceived as holding. But, as stressed, these preferences are likely *not* to agree with expert opinion. Indeed, it seems felicitous—and,

³³ Note that this does not necessarily imply that the proletarian is sacrificing enjoyment of food, art, music, and so on. Notably, psychological research indicates that individuals express greater enjoyment of food and drink when the items consumed *reflect their values* (cf. Allen, Gupta, and Monnier 2008). Certain consumer products have become associated with certain values and interests; although this might be orthogonal to *aesthetic* value, the influence on enjoyment is real.

³⁴ On the flip side, it is also worth note that insofar as individuals *do* acquire (or express) a taste for possessors of genuine aesthetic value, we cannot take for granted that they do so *on the basis of* aesthetic value. Individuals might attempt to acquire the tastes of other classes, or at least feign having done so, as a means to *gain entry* into these classes.

in the situations that we have described, perhaps quite useful—for speakers to use objectively-framed taste sentences to express preferences known to *disagree* with expert opinion. Insofar as expert opinion on matters of taste is associated with socio-economic elitism, this might be precisely the point. One upshot is that, in common practice, there is often no need for speakers to divorce themselves from the influence of their values, social pressure, and so forth, and evaluate the object dispassionately—as a critic purely of its aesthetic worth. On the contrary, there might often be great demands for them *not* to do so—given their all-things-considered interests. It does not seem that they are aiming to assert facts about genuine aesthetic value but getting them wrong—nor do they seem simply to be *lying* about what does and does not possess aesthetic value. It seems instead that they are engaged in a practice distinct from aesthetic criticism.

As I mentioned above, taste tracks social affiliation not only between social classes (vertically) but also between sub-groups within a social class (horizontally). By having and expressing certain preference, an individual can identify herself as a member of one subculture or another, whether or not this subculture is in more or less socio-economically privileged than the other subcultures, or the mainstream, from which it is differentiated. Here again, social concerns are likely to trump purely aesthetic concerns in the cultivation and expression of taste (although the tastes of the mainstream might be denigrated primarily for their alleged *aesthetic* inferiority). Taste-based subcultures are particularly noticeable in contemporary youth culture; consider the goth, punk, hip hop, rave, industrial (a.k.a. rivethead), grunge, emo, or various heavy metal subcultures.

Quite plausibly, most subcultures are based in *fads*. This does not, however,

diminish the importance of taste discourse within and between subcultures. In publicly expressing one's tastes, one might identify oneself as part of a certain in-group—and, correspondingly, *not* as part of certain out-groups (which might be decidedly unhip). And, in expressing one's tastes *to members of a clique in which one hopes to gain entry*, one hopes to present oneself as “one of us.” Granted, I am not sure whether or not most elite members of specific subcultures consider their subculture-specific tastes to possess greater aesthetic value than those of other subcultures, or high culture, or so on. (It does seem, as I have noted, that they are likely to consider these tastes to be aesthetically superior to those of the popular mainstream.) We might expect, however, that taste-based subcultures would endure *even if* they self-consciously denied that they are superior judges of genuine aesthetic value (for example). Subcultures unite individuals with *common* tastes and interests, *even if* these tastes and interests are the product of individual whims, desired social affiliations, and so, rather than pure responses to aesthetic value. Members might frequently praise the objects of the unifying predilections, and disparage the preferences of out-groups, as a means to bond socially. What is important is not that they agree that their preferences track aesthetic value—but, simply, that these are their common preferences.

So far, I have emphasized that individuals sometimes actively adopt and express certain tastes as means to fit in with a certain group. But we should note that the social importance of taste does not appear to be limited to its role in uniting and distinguishing groups of individuals through in-group commonality (and out-group dissimilarity). On the contrary, especially in individualistic cultures like our own, speakers might also

express their uncommon and idiosyncratic preferences as means to display their individuality and autonomy. Thus, in some contexts, speakers might strive to affirm the *uniqueness* of their tastes even amongst friends, prospective romantic partners, etc., rather than signaling a desire to conform. Here again, the expression of certain tastes is dissociable from the objective of gauging aesthetic value. When individuals reveal their idiosyncratic tastes, they might do so *simply* to be perceived as individuals or non-conformists; they do not necessarily view their own tastes as *superior* to those of their peers (in any sense)—merely as *different*.³⁵

It should now be clear, upon reflection on the above social phenomena, that speakers' choices to express certain tastes is influenced not only by attention to aesthetic value, but also by the desire to be accepted by certain social groups, or to be perceived—or avoid being perceived—as a certain type of person. None of this, I take it, is any novel insight into taste discourse; nevertheless, it deserves to be made more salient in the contexts of aesthetics and philosophy of language. Just as importantly, I think, philosophers should devote more attention not only the social role of *taste* but also to the social role of *talk*—and, so, to the social role of talk about taste. That is, the theorist should not ignore the importance of communication *per se*, including mere small talk or phatic communication, in everyday discourse.

In this light, it is useful to consider much taste-talk as a subset of small-talk. It

³⁵ Ariely and Levav (2000) conducted a series of experiments on the effects of ordering aloud in restaurants with product selection; the results were that, when customers ordered aloud instead of by secret ballot, they were more likely to choose *differently* from others in their group (which Ariely attributes to a “need for uniqueness”).

seems that speakers frequently discuss matters of taste largely because this is a relatively safe and effective way to generate conversation. Talk about taste is relatively *safe* because it is a topic about which speakers can often expect a good deal of agreement—and about which those disagreements that do arise can be expected to be relatively innocuous. (Compare discussion of taste, for example, to discussion of religion or politics. Although disputes about taste certain *can* become vociferous, raising the topic has not—in general—reached the level of social *faux pas*.) Moreover, talk about taste is a relatively effective way to generate conversation since most speakers have tastes about which they feel strongly—since one's strong likes and dislikes are, it seems, inherently affectively-laden—and which they enjoy discussing. Thus, it seems, matters of personal taste and preference are frequently broached in small-talk settings as way of making conversation—and thereby building intimacy and solidarity—while maintaining a relatively low risk of serious controversy. In these settings, once again, there is little reason to think that speakers would discuss *what the experts like* (etc.), as opposed to their own personal preferences; indeed, given the function of small-talk to engender familiarity, there is reason to suppose that they would favor the latter.

Of course, the various functions of taste discourse described above are not specific to *disputes* about matters of taste. Indeed, where the broader function of the conversation is to build goodwill and solidarity, it might seem that disagreement is dispreferred—especially, perhaps, disagreement expressed in the objective frame (for the very reasons suggested in §2). Indeed, when disagreement is encountered, speakers often *do* retreat to explicitly subjectively-framed taste sentences. My hypothesis is that the

retreat to the subjective frame in the context of disputes about taste is a device of “negative politeness” in the sense of Brown and Levinson (1987). That is, it signifies deference or democracy—even if not a change in topic (e.g. from genuine aesthetic value to mere personal preference). The subjective frame is useful to avoid the implication that one finds another’s taste to be inferior in any way—but note that it is not always necessary to avoid this implication. Speakers might choose adopt of the objective frame in contexts of *dispute* out of mock impoliteness—as in teasing—or, indeed, genuine impoliteness.

Now, as it turns out, one of many reasons to adopt the objective frame in dispute about taste might be—and almost certain *is*—to project authority for the purpose of informing interlocutors about “good taste” in some intersubjective sense. I have argued that the use of objective frame of taste sentences adds emphasis and intensity. The intensifying function of the objective frame, in turn, renders the construction useful in contexts in which speakers wish to persuade others to conform to their preferences—or, perhaps more generally, in which speakers wish to present themselves as an having confidence, experience, and authority in the matter under discussion. This can account for why “experts” about matters of taste might adopt the objective frame in voicing their opinions. On the flip side, because the use of the objective frame implicates that the speaker is resolute and self-assured in her judgement of taste, it might be socially inappropriate to adopt it in conversation with an expert—since speakers tend to expect that those with less knowledge and experience (apropos of the topic of discussion) should exhibit deference toward those with more. This is polite, as it shows respect for the

authority of the expert. Moreover, speakers are often simply reticent to expose the lack of sophistication of their own tastes. My account, therefore, can be employed in explaining why experts might be more likely than novices to use the objective frame, and why novices might renege on objectively-framed taste claims when confronted with a clashing judgement from an expert. Thus, I believe, my account has the resources to explain the relationship between the use of the objective frame and *social* deference—without, if you will, requiring *semantic* deference.

In summary, then, there is no need to deny that objective measures of good taste *exist*—nor that speakers are disposed to acknowledge their existence and even, at times, hold their tastes and preferences accountable to them—only that this exhausts taste discourse, or taste discourse *in which objectively-framed sentences are used*. I have argued that taste discourse possesses important social functions that are served—and, plausibly, are *best* served—when speakers discuss their present personal preferences rather than genuine aesthetic value. Such functions include the display of social and/or self-identity, developing solidarity through shared taste (whatever these tastes might be), and developing solidarity through small-talk; these functions would not necessarily be furthered—and might indeed be hindered—if conversation about actual preferences were replaced by discussion about which of these preferences would pass tests like convergence in the preference of experts, endurance across periods and cultures, or other proposed measures of objectively good taste. My account is flexible enough to fit these practices.

Chapter 3: The Pervasiveness of “Faultless” Disputes

Some philosophers and linguists have noted that the appearance of faultless disagreement is not limited to objectively-framed disputes about taste. Perhaps most notably, disputes involving vague scalar predicates have at times been associated with the same phenomenon. Speakers with different standards of wealth, for example, might be said to “faultlessly disagree” about whether an American who earns \$250,000 a year is rich.

Noticing this similarity, Kennedy (2013) proposes that there are two distinct semantic underpinnings of the appearance of faultless disagreement, which he describes as *evaluativity* and *vagueness*: faultless disagreement can arise between speakers who differ in their qualitative assessments of an object of evaluation, and thus differ with respect to whether they are willing to apply some evaluative predicate (such as ‘tasty’ or ‘disgusting’) to that object; it can also arise, however, between speakers who differ in their opinions regarding what degree of some property or dimension (e.g. income level) is required to apply a vague predicate (e.g. ‘rich’) to an object of consideration. While this is an important insight, I wish to stress that evaluativity and vagueness, in Kennedy’s senses, are not the *only* sources of the appearance of faultless disagreement—and, even when they are present, I maintain that these properties do not play an essential role in explaining the phenomenon.

In Chapter 1, I attempted to clarify the features of alleged cases of faultless

disagreement that seem to merit their attention by semanticists and philosophers of language. To recall, taking disputes about taste as a case study, I reconstructed the explananda in terms of what I called “FD-Shape.” Although designed to be semantically neutral, FD-Shape appears sufficient to motivate common disagreement-based worries for traditional semantics; therefore, I have taken it as a proxy for the comparatively imprecise notion of “faultless disagreement.” I will continue to employ FD-Shape for this purpose in the present chapter.

If FD-Shape—in conjunction with Truth Norm and Contradiction Norm—is sufficient to motivate relativism about predicates of personal taste, as I argued in Chapter 1, then it should also be sufficient to motivate relativistic semantics for other predicates that can occur in disputes that possess FD-Shape. For the reasons to be discussed in this chapter, however, *no* predicate of natural language is barred from use in such disputes—and herein lies the rub: it is doubtful that theorists like MacFarlane and Lasersohn would accept the conclusion that we must adopt relativism for *every* predicate. Thus, I take the conclusion of the present chapter to provide additional evidence that the argument from faultless disagreement to relativism is misguided. At the very least, the burden is on the relativist to specify what *additionally* must hold of a dispute to motivate a relativistic semantics for some predicates (like predicates of personal taste) but not for others.

I begin this chapter by demonstrating that certain disputes involving vague scalar predicates also possess FD-Shape (§1). Moreover, following Kennedy, I argue that disputes about taste cannot simply be assimilated to disputes over borderline cases of vague predicates insofar as we are concerned to explain the source of FD-Shape. I

proceed to show that FD-Shape is even more wide-ranging than might be expected. First, I show that FD-Shape can occur in disputes involving vague predicates in which the disputants disagree with respect to elements of the predicates' application conditions *other than merely its cutoff point* (§2). I proceed to argue that the phenomenon can arise in the absence of both vagueness and evaluativity (in Kennedy's sense): a variety of disputes manifest FD-Shape, even though the contested predicates seem neither evaluative nor vague (§3). Indeed, I ultimately maintain that *any* predicate can, in principle, be used in a dispute than manifests FD-Shape (§4). Consequently, it is not necessary to appeal to special semantic properties such as vagueness or evaluativity to explain why "faultless disagreement effects," as captured by the notion of FD-Shape, can arise for a given term.³⁶

1. Faultless Disagreement's Second Source: Vagueness

Many vague predicates—including many that, unlike predicates of personal taste, are not apparently evaluative—can be used in disputes that manifest FD-Shape. This is not a novel observation (except, of course, for the formulation in terms of FD-Shape instead of "faultless disagreement"). Drawing upon observations similar to those reviewed in Chapter 1, Richard (2004, 2008) contends that disputes about borderline cases of vague

³⁶ One might still wonder whether possessing these semantic properties nonetheless causes it to be *more likely* that a given predicate would be used in such disputes. I think that, even if certain semantic properties like vagueness and evaluative are *correlated* with more frequent actual occurrences of FD-Shape, the *causes* of this difference are a complex of social and psychological factors external to them. It would take us too far afield to discuss this issue here, but cf. Chapter 5, §3.

predicates provide compelling evidence in favor of a relativist semantics for vague predicates—and, as noted, Chris Kennedy has recently stressed that both disputes about taste and disputes over borderline cases of vague predicates may display faultless disagreement effects. (See also Barker 2013.) I employ FD-Shape to bolster the analogy between these types of disputes (§1.1).

At this point, noting that predicates of personal taste are themselves vague, it might be tempting to locate the source of faultless disagreement in vagueness—but, as I will argue, there are two good reasons not to do so. First, the canonical cases of FD-Shaped disputes involving non-evaluative vague predicates are disputes over the location of a *cutoff point* for applying the predicate, where a *scale* or *dimension of evaluation* has already been agreed upon by disputants; following Kennedy, I argue that disputes about taste cannot be assimilated to disputes over cutoff points (§1.2). This observation leads Kennedy to hypothesize that a deeper root of faultless disagreement is shared by both kinds of cases, a type of uncertainty surrounding the dimensions of evaluation along which a cutoff point is to be selected (cf. 2013, p. 276). I pursue this idea in §2; ultimately, though, this investigation will expose the second reason not to locate the source of faultless disagreement in vagueness: vagueness itself is not necessary for FD-Shape.

1.1 Disputing Cutoff Points

Theorists such as Richard (2004, 2008), Barker (2013), and Kennedy (2013) have maintained that vague predicates permit faultless disagreement over the classification of

their borderline cases. The semantic facts fail to determine a precise cutoff point for applying such predicates; thus, competent speakers can sometimes “go either way” in deciding whether to apply, or refrain from applying, the term.

The following disputes, again gathered from on-line forums, present plausible examples of the phenomenon in question:

- (8) President Obama [as cited by a blogger]:
Single people making over \$200,000 are rich.

Robert:
Hitting \$200,000 per year is not rich, and shouldn’t be taxed as such.³⁷

- (9) Let’s Go Riot:
Over 50 Is not Old. ... Right?

Haha:
Considering all the under 50 that have been dropping like flies...50 must be old!³⁸

- (10) MILF Mommy:
Size 12, you’re fat!

Mayay:
OMG!! A size 12 is NOT fat by all means.³⁹

I submit that (8), (9), and (10) exemplify FD-Shape.⁴⁰ In each case, both speakers seem

³⁷ “What Income Level Is Considered Rich?” Financial Samurai (Jan 27, 2012) <<http://www.financialsamurai.com/2012/01/27/how-much-income-do-you-consider-to-be-rich/>>, accessed July 13, 2013.

³⁸ “Over 50 Is not Old,” Brookville Forum. Topix. (April 5, 2012) <<http://www.topix.com/forum/city/brookville-in/TOL0N1UND0U4R06U4>>, accessed Sep 23, 2013.

³⁹ “Size 12, You’re Fat,” Momlogic: What Moms are Talking About (Aug 8, 2008) <http://www.momlogic.com/2008/08/size_12_youre_fat.php>, accessed Sep 23, 2013.

⁴⁰ Although (9) and (10) manifest slight differences in syntactic structure from our core cases, these differences need not concern us here. (Haha in (9) uses a modal in “50 must be old,” and MILF Mommy in (10)—but not Mayay—formulates her claim in the

likely to be disposed to assert their respective claims regardless of the information available to them; thus, Faultlessness Analogue holds of these cases. Furthermore, in each example, the respondent is most likely disposed to invoke Contradiction Shape regardless of the available information. This entails that Disagreement Analogue holds. Lastly, none of the speakers in (8), (9), and (10) should strike us as logically or linguistically incompetent (regardless of whether we ourselves reject their standards of wealth, age, or corpulence)—and this intuition, presumably, is not undermined by our recognition that Faultlessness Analogue and Disagreement Analogue are both met.

It is, I think, worth discussing the intuitions behind Faultlessness Analogue and Disagreement Analogue in a bit more detail. Theorists like Richard, Barker, and Kennedy would most likely explain Faultlessness Analogue in these cases by noting that the linguistic facts fail to determine any precise cutoff point for what income level qualifies one as “rich,” what age qualifies one as “old,” or what dress-size qualifies one as “fat” and that, meanwhile, competent speakers can vary in their own judgements on these matters. There is, therefore, no information that would have led either speaker to conclude that she was incorrect in her classification; since both speakers employ linguistically acceptable sharpenings of ‘rich’, ‘old’, and ‘fat’ (in the respective examples), neither speaker *is* incorrect. They might stress, moreover, that the disputes in (8), (9), and (10) arise *solely* due to different opinions as to the cutoff points for the

second-person, as if addressing size 12 individuals specifically rather than simply talking *about* them with others.) If the reader prefers, imagine a speaker who replies to Let’s Go Riot by saying “50 *is* old,” and one who replies to Mayay by saying “A size 12 *is* fat.” These exchanges remain felicitous.

applying the respective predicates; that is, it does not seem to be the case that one speaker is simply ignorant of relevant facts about the topic of discussion. Meanwhile, it does not seem to be the case that either speaker in these examples is unaware of relevant linguistic facts—such as the conventional standards for the applying the predicate in use, or (perhaps more accurately) the fact that such standards are prone to vary according to one’s perspective.

To be sure, we can imagine similar disputes in which one speaker *is* ignorant of relevant information that would have altered his or her judgement—whether information about the specific topic of discussion, or about established conventions for using terms like ‘rich’, ‘old’, or ‘fat’—and which therefore fail to possess Faultlessness Analogue. It could be, for example, that either Robert or President Obama is missing information about the distribution of incomes in America, or about the purchasing power of \$200,000, which would have caused him to retract his claim. (Perhaps, say, Obama has underestimated the amount of arugula that one can buy at Whole Foods with \$200,000.) But, I think, our intuition is that such information would matter little to either speaker; more likely, we suppose, the speakers employ different standards for applying ‘rich’ that derive from more deeply entrenched differences in personal and political interests (cf. Robert’s remark about taxation)—and that these differences cannot be dissolved through the accumulation of information. On similar lines, notice that Haha at least pretends to cite empirical evidence in favor of his/her position in (9): individuals of age 50 “must be old” because many younger people “have been dropping like flies.” But it is unlikely that speakers who deny that 50-year-olds are “old” would be persuaded by such evidence.

Additionally, some disputes fail to manifest Faultlessness Analogue because one speaker is ignorant of certain established conditions for applying a term. Suppose, for example, that MILF Mommy and Mayay were to argue about whether an individual with a BMI of 28 is morbidly obese; MILF Mommy, say, asserts “BMI 28, you’re morbidly obese!” and Mayay replies “A BMI of 28 is not morbidly obese.” Here, Faultlessness Analogue might not hold—assuming that their debate concerns what a certain medical definition actually *is*.⁴¹ As this scenario has been described, there *is* additional information—the information, specifically, that the medical community recognizes a BMI of 40 as the lower bound on “morbid obesity”—that would have prevented MILF Mommy from uttering what she actually did. In contrast, however, (8), (9), and (10) do not strike us as scenarios in which one speaker simply misclassifies because he or she is ignorant of the “correct” standards for the applying the predicate. It is quite unlikely that the speakers in these respective exchanges are disposed to defer a common standard or authority with respect to the use of ‘rich’, ‘old’, or ‘fat’.⁴² Instead, it seems, the speakers are robustly disposed to employ different, and incompatible, standards of application—which, again, presumably arise from differences in perspective or personal interest that are unlikely to be resolved upon the accumulation of information.

Perhaps it is a bit more contentious to maintain that Disagreement Analogue holds

⁴¹ It is possible, of course, to imagine a case in which MILF Mommy does not intend to use ‘morbidly obese’ with deference to this official medical definition—and willingly applies the term to anyone who strikes her as grossly fat. The present point is simply that we can also easily imagine that she is simply mistaken about the standard medical definition, in which case Faultlessness Analogue would not hold.

⁴² Cf. Richard (2008, pp. 96-99) on a similar interpretation of disputes involving ‘rich’.

in (8), (9), and (10). This is because it might be a tempting position—judging from the philosophical literature on merely verbal disputes (cf. Chapter 4)—to maintain that the considerations just raised in support of Faultlessness Analogue reveal that the speakers “mean different things” by the predicates that they are using and, therefore, that their disputes manifest no “genuine” disagreement. Indeed, Cappelen and Lepore (2005) make this claim with respect to an example due to Richard (2004) in which two speakers, Didi and Naomi, argue about whether the millionaire Mary is “rich” (and, thus, not unlike our own example (8)). Cappelen and Lepore state: “it is very easy to get informants to accept that Didi and Naomi don’t disagree. They didn’t contradict each other. ‘Mary is rich’ uttered by Naomi says something different from that sentence as uttered by Didi” (p. 1047).⁴³

But suppose that this is so. It is, I submit, of little importance from the standpoint of asking whether the dispute manifests FD-Shape—for, in order for the premise that the disputants “don’t disagree” to entail that Disagreement Analogue doesn’t hold, it seems we must assume that the respondent would not have directly denied the initial speaker’s utterance (i.e. would not have invoked Contradiction Shape) if she had known about the difference between that speaker’s use of ‘rich’ and her own. In other words, if we are to conclude that Disagreement Analogue fails for cases like (8), (9), and (10), we must intuit

⁴³ Sidelle (2007) makes a similar claim about disputes like (8), (9), and (10); see the discussion of the “dismissive approach” to merely verbal disputes in Chapter 4, §1.

For a closely related claim with respect to the use of predicates of personal taste, see Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, p. 111) and Stojanovic (2007, pp. 694-695); these authors hold that, if A really means only to express his own preferences by a taste claim, and yet B denies A’s claim, then B must have misunderstood A. But this, it seems, simply misunderstands taste discourse (cf. Chapter 2).

that information about differences between the speakers' contexts or idiolects must have an influence akin to what would be expected in scenarios like (5), (6), and (7)—about which we do intuit, presumably, that the respondents would be disposed to admit that they should not have invoked Contradiction Shape (i.e., that they should not have contested the initial speaker's utterance).

But the latter interpretation seems inaccurate as applied to (8), (9), and (10)—for the simple reason that, most likely, the respective speakers *were* aware in the discrepancies in question at the time of their reply, and yet they denied the initial speakers' utterances *despite* (and perhaps *because of*) this awareness. Robert probably realizes that Obama—like, perhaps, Democrats in general—applies 'rich' to individuals of lower incomes than he himself would. Likewise, Haha and Mayay presumably understand that speakers vary in their perceptions of "old" and "fat," and further understand that this fact accounts for the differences between their own classifications of 50-year-olds and size-12 women and those of their interlocutors. Thus, in contrast to (5), (6), and (7), it does not seem that the second speakers in (8), (9), and (10) are merely lacking information that would have caused them to refrain from invoking Contradiction Shape. This implies that Disagreement Analogue holds.

To summarize, then, the problem with the anticipated objection that the speakers "mean different things" is that it is no help in understanding Disagreement Analogue. Even if the speakers in our exchanges fail to contradict one another, we owe an account of this feature of the disputes—which, it seems, still obtains. This is a significant disanalogy between cases like (8), (9), and (10) and those like (5), (6), and (7)—and it

would be unfairly elided if we simply state that, in each of these cases, the speakers don't contradict one another (end of discussion). If the speakers in our cases of interest do mean different things by their words, this would only demonstrate that Disagreement Analogue can obtain in some cases in which speakers mean different things by their words; this itself would be a surprising result that demands further investigation and explanation. Discussion cannot end upon concluding that the speakers "mean different things." This point should be kept in mind as we examine other cases of which the same diagnosis might be given, in this chapter and the following.

I conclude, then, that certain disputes over the application of vague predicates—such as (8), (9), and (10)—manifest FD-Shape. In particular, as others have also noted, such disputes can arise when speakers differ in their opinion as to the appropriate cutoff point for applying the predicate (e.g., in our cases, what income counts as "rich," what age counts as "old," and what dress sizes counts as "fat"). Plausibly, this phenomenon extends to any vague predicate (as I presume Richard, Barker, and Kennedy would agree)—since competent speakers could always differ as to the classification of borderline cases without erring of the semantic facts (or non-semantic facts for that matter).

Thus, with respect to FD-Shape—our proxy for faultless disagreement—objectively-framed taste disputes are structurally analogous to dispute involving vagueness like (8), (9), and (10). This shows that a predicate need not be evaluative (in Kennedy's sense of depending on the qualitative assessment of a judge) in order to participate in FD-Shape. Disputes like (8), (9), and (10) can arise even if the properties

used to determine richness, oldness, and fatness are measured by wholly subject-neutral means—as, in these respective examples, they seem to be. The measurements of annual income, age in years, and size in American women’s clothing do not vary according to judge or assessor; insofar as they do vary, it seems, this suggests only that someone has erred in their measurement. This renders these respective uses of ‘rich’, ‘old’, and ‘fat’ non-evaluative (at least according to Kennedy’s sense of “evaluativity”).

1.2 Is Vagueness the Source of Faultless Disagreement?

The examples and discussion of §1.1 demonstrate that evaluativity is not essential to FD-Shape; vagueness is often sufficient to produce analogous sorts of “faultless disagreement” effects. Meanwhile, it appears that predicates of personal taste are themselves vague scalar predicates: tastiness, “funness,” and so forth seem to come in degrees—and there seem to be no precise standards to determine how good something must taste to count as “tasty” or enjoyable something must be to count as “fun.” This might suggest that *vagueness* lies at the root of FD-Shape: perhaps there is nothing special about predicates of personal taste *per se*; perhaps instead, in all cases, the phenomenon ultimately arises due to indeterminacy associated with the cutoff point for applying a vague predicate.⁴⁴

This conclusion, however, seems unwarranted. Although predicates like ‘tasty’

⁴⁴ Some theorists seem to hold this position. Barker (2013), for example, seems inclined to assimilate at least some disputes about taste to disputes over a standard for how good something must taste to count as “tasty.” Glanzberg also seems to interpret disputes about taste in this manner (cf. 2007, p. 15).

and ‘fun’ are themselves vague, disputes about taste like (1) and (3) do not seem to amount to disputes as to whether or not pie and Diablo III possess sufficient degrees of “tastiness” or “funness” to qualify as “tasty” and “fun”. Kennedy (2013) makes this point persuasively—noting, as one important datum, that disputes about taste persist in the comparative form while disputes over cutoff points of vague predicates do not. The basic idea here seems to be this: if speakers merely differ in their opinions as to how much of a certain quantity *Q* is necessary for the predicate ‘*F*’ to apply, and if *x* has *Q* to a greater extent than *y*, then there is no room for dispute over whether “*x* is *F*-er than *y*.” Speakers cannot disagree—at least not at all *faultlessly*—about whether “size 14 is fatter than size 12” or whether “60-years-old is older than 50-years-old” for example. But speakers *can* reasonably (and apparently faultlessly) disagree about whether pie is tastier than cake, or whether Diablo III is more fun than Diablo II. Despite the use of the comparative forms of ‘tasty’ and ‘fun’, the appearance of faultless disagreement remains. There must, therefore, be some additional source of the faultless disagreement effects; this, according to Kennedy, is the element of qualitative assessment in deciding whether to apply a term like ‘tasty’ or ‘fun’ (or, at the object level, in deciding whether something *is* tasty or fun).

The relevant differences, I think, can also be explained more intuitively. Notice that, in cases like (8), (9), and (10), the participants can be assumed to agree upon the appropriate scales or dimensions for measuring richness, oldness, and fatness (at least within the conversational context); the agreed-upon scales are, respectively, annual income (in dollars), age (in years), and dress size (in American woman’s dress sizes—at least as standardized as they get). Indeed, agreement upon a common scale seems to be a

necessary prerequisite to disputes concerning the location of a cutoff point *along this scale*. Disputes about taste, however, seem disanalogous—for it seems that different speakers, in essence, measure tastiness and “funness” differently.

Despite this, however, Kennedy raises the suggestion that vagueness might still lie at the root of both sources of faultless disagreement; in particular, he conjectures that “it is uncertainty about the dimensions of evaluation involved in calculating a standard of comparison [i.e. cutoff point] that underlies uncertainty about the standards themselves, and so introduces the possibility of faultless disagreement” (2013, p. 276). Indeed, Kennedy argues that disputes about taste can be fruitfully understood as situations in which speakers have not fixed dimensions of evaluation for measuring (say) “tastiness” and “funness” (cf. p. 276). We might describe a dispute of taste between A and B as one in which A and B employ different instruments to measure the properties of interest: A uses A’s affective states to gauge tastiness, funness, and so on, while B uses B’s. Or we might say that A measures these quantities in units of pleasure-for-A, while B measures them in units of pleasure-for-B. In any case, it is not that A and B *agree* that an object of assessment possesses a certain level of pleasurability (for instance), but disagree as to whether this level of pleasurability is high enough to qualify its possessor as ‘tasty’ or ‘fun’; instead, it seems, A and B fail to agree about how to measure pleasurability in the first place. While I have described the situation a bit differently from Kennedy, the basic point stands.

Thus, it seems, disputes about taste are more akin to a dispute over an individual’s “richness” in which speakers have not agreed upon whether income or assets provide the

appropriate dimension by which to assess how rich a person is—or a dispute over an individual’s “fatness” in which speakers have not agreed upon whether BMI or body fat percentage is the appropriate dimension by which to assess how fat a person is. Note, however, that the latter types of disputes have not commonly been presented as examples of faultless disagreement. Instead, in fact, theorists have often seemed to suggest that faultless disagreement can only arise—at least in cases involving vague but non-evaluative predicates—when the values of all other context-sensitive variables associated with the predicate (e.g. the comparison class and presumably the dimension of evaluative) have already been settled uniformly between the disputants. Otherwise, the disputants are merely “talking past one another” and do not “really disagree” (cf. Richard 2008, p. 102; Kennedy 2013, p. 263).

Kennedy himself does not discuss other cases—beyond disputes about taste—in which faultless disagreement effects emerge in the absence of agreement on a common scale or dimension of evaluation. Given his previously cited conjecture, however, we might expect that such disputes can indeed arise in cases in which speakers disagree about the values of parameters for applying a vague predicate beyond merely the cutoff point, such as the comparison class or the relevant dimension of evaluation. In §2, I present evidence that FD-Shaped disputes can indeed arise in these latter types of cases; the phenomenon is by no means limited to scenarios in which disputants differ *only* with respect to the value of a cutoff point. This might at first seem to substantiate Kennedy’s hypothesis that, although there are some “faultless” disputes that cannot be assimilated to disputes over the value of a cutoff, the ultimate source of the phenomenon nonetheless

resides in vagueness—specifically, though, in “uncertainty about the dimensions of evaluation involved in calculating a standard of comparison” for vague predicates. I will argue, however, that even this diagnosis is too narrow: FD-Shape can arise for types of “uncertainty” that have nothing do with vagueness at all. (Given this, in turn, it should be no surprise that FD-Shape can arise for many reasons when vague predicates *are* used.)

2. Further Dimensions of Dispute

In §1.2, I highlighted Kennedy’s conjecture that the root of faultless disagreement—whether evaluative or (merely) vague predicates are used—lies in the fact that speakers can disagree about the appropriate dimension of evaluation for applying the predicate. In taste disputes, for example, we might think of different individuals as providing different scales for measuring tastiness, “funness,” and so on—which may yield incompatible measurements. It is not that the disputants have not yet fine-tuned an imprecise scale for measuring tastiness (for example); on the contrary, they have not even agreed upon *what* scale—that is, *whose* tastes and preferences—should be used to measure tastiness. (Or, if you prefer, they have not agreed upon what property they should measure when gauging “tastiness.”)

In this section, I extend this idea by arguing that even apparently *non-evaluative* vague predicates can be used in FD-Shaped disputes in which speakers do not merely debate the location of a cutoff point along an agreed-upon scale for measuring some property (as in our examples of richness, oldness, and fatness in §1.1)—but, instead, disagree about how the property in question should be measured in the first place (or,

perhaps, about what specific property should be measured to determine whether the predicate applies). I will begin, however, more abstractly—noting a common respect in which, at a broad level, FD-Shape is facilitated by both evaluativity and indeterminacy in the standards for applying vague predicates (§2.1). Simply put, Faultlessness Analogue is encouraged *whenever* speakers robustly differ in their standards for applying some predicate. I proceed to apply the idea to cases in which speakers differ according to the *comparison class* for applying a vague predicate (§2.2) and those in which they differ according to even more basic parameters, such as a scale of dimension of evaluation (§2.3)—observations which, I believe, should prepare the reader for the even wider ranging diagnoses of FD-Shape in §§3-4.

2.1 Why Evaluativity and Dimensionality Promote FD-Shape

Before we delve deeper into our investigation of the sources and scope of FD-Shape, we might step back to consider just why evaluativity and vagueness seem to contribute to the phenomenon. At a broad level, it seems, both contribute in much the same way: both promote Faultlessness Analogue by allowing different speakers to adopt divergent application conditions for the predicates used in the disputes.

Faultlessness Analogue holds when we intuit that two speakers, A and B, apply ‘F’ according to different criteria of application (and are not disposed to defer to the same common authority or standard for ‘F’). Suppose that A applies ‘F’ to x iff $C_A(x)$ and B applies ‘F’ to x iff $C_B(x)$, and exactly one of $C_A(a)$ and $C_B(a)$ obtains. In this case, Faultlessness Analogue would hold in a dispute between A and B concerning the truth of

‘ a is F ’. Now, the two properties discussed by Kennedy, evaluativity and vagueness, provide two possible sources for this interpersonal divergence in criteria of application. Consider, as paradigmatic examples, ‘tasty’ and ‘rich’. On one common use of ‘tasty’, any given speaker S applies ‘tasty’ to x iff x tastes good to S .⁴⁵ Thus, in the above schema, we can take $C_A(x)$ to be equivalent to “ x tastes good to A ” and $C_B(x)$ to be equivalent to “ x tastes good to B ”; obviously, these criteria of application for ‘tasty’ diverge for all x ’s that taste good to A but not B or vice versa. In the case of ‘rich’, we might suppose that A and B both follow rules of the form “Apply ‘rich’ to x iff x has an income greater than y ,” where A and B ’s shared language has fixed no single precise value for y . If A employs the cutoff point y_A and B employs the cutoff point y_B , then A and B ’s criteria of application for ‘rich’ diverge for all x ’s that have an income between y_A and y_B .

It seems, then, that semantic properties of ‘tasty’ and ‘rich’ do conduce to Faultlessness Analogue in exchanges involving these predicates (and, of course, analogues hold for other predicates of personal taste and vague predicates)—but, given this description of the source of Faultlessness Analogue, it should be equally apparent that the condition can be met due to other types of differences between A and B ’s criteria for applying some predicate ‘ F ’. Indeed, Faultlessness Analogue can arise if ‘ F ’ is ambiguous across A and B ’s dialects (as with ‘pissed’ in (7)—which, to recall, was a counterexample to *Disagreement Analogue*, not Faultlessness Analogue).

Now, of course, Faultlessness Analogue is not yet FD-Shape—and, thus, there

⁴⁵ Cf., e.g., MacFarlane (2014) and Egan (2010) for discussion.

might still be something special about evaluativity and vagueness (i.e., especially, the indeterminacy associated with the fixation of a cutoff points) such that only these types of context-sensitivity permit both Faultlessness Analogue *and Disagreement Analogue*. This conjecture, however, can be disproven empirically—as I will demonstrate below and in §3.

2.2 Comparison Classes

Theorists like Richard seem to have taken for granted that faultless disagreement does not arise when two speakers apply a vague predicate according to different comparison classes—if, for example, President Obama uses ‘rich’ to mean *rich for a human being* and Robert (in (8)) uses ‘rich’ to mean *rich for a Fortune 500 CEO*. Instead, a common supposition seems to be that the speakers simply do not disagree in such scenarios (cf. §1.2).

It is simply not true, however, that scenarios in which speakers fail to agree upon a comparison class for a vague predicate *cannot be instances of FD-Shape*. Indeed, on the contrary, it seems that a difference in opinion concerning the appropriate comparison class can itself be the source of controversy—as in the fictional exchange (11):

- (11) Naomi:
They [a family of five slightly below the poverty line, who live in a low-income apartment complex and dine primarily on fast food] are poor.
- Jake:
No way. They aren’t poor. They have a home, plenty of food, and a color television. If you want to see what poverty is, go to Haiti or Zimbabwe—not urban America.

Is (11) a dispute about the appropriate *cutoff point* for applying ‘poor’ *given* a comparison

class agreed upon by Naomi and Jake—or is it, more basically, a dispute about what *comparison class* is appropriate for determining whether a certain standard of living qualifies as “poor”? It is quite plausible, I believe, to describe (11) in the latter terms.

More to the point: even if we stipulate that Naomi and Jake have in mind different comparison classes for assessing poverty, FD-Shape seems to hold. This stipulation does not affect our intuitions concerning the conditions under which Naomi and Jake would give up their respective claims or (perhaps more to the present concern) abandon the dispute itself. Assume that Naomi uses American families as the comparison class, while Jake uses families *worldwide*. Does this undermine Disagreement Analogue? No. Even if Jake realizes that Naomi employs the comparison class of American families, he seems almost certain to contest Naomi’s claim—for Jake’s very point seems to be that poverty should be assessed *only with respect to a global comparison class* (even when the individuals under discussion happen to be Americans).

For another example of the phenomenon, recall (10)—the discussion forum debate about whether a size 12 is “fat.” In fleshing out this scenario (no pun intended), it is easy to imagine that MILF Mommy and Mayay employ different comparison classes for evaluating fatness. Perhaps MILF Mommy, who contends that size 12 *is* fat, takes fashion models as her comparison class—while Mayay, who disputes MILF Mommy’s claim, has in mind the comparison class of American women in general. This stipulation, as in (11), does not undermine Disagreement Analogue; we have the intuition, I presume, that Mayay would contest MILF Mommy’s claim even if she realizes that MILF Mommy uses ‘fat’ to mean *fat for a fashion model*. This, I presume, is because we imagine that

Mayay—like Jake in (11)—is strongly opinionated as to what comparison classes should be used to assess “fatness,” and she is likely to deny that fashion models constitute an appropriate comparison class for this purpose (e.g. on the basis that this fosters unrealistic standards of slimness among young women).

Thus, although Richard and others might characterize them as cases of non-genuine disagreement, neither (11) nor the elaborated version of (10) fails of *Disagreement Analogue*. These scenarios are significantly different from “talkings-past” like (5), (6), and (7), in which it seems that the respondent would not have disputed the initial speaker’s claim if he had been aware of certain relevant differences in context or word use. Speakers can felicitously deny others’ ascriptions of vague predicates despite differing in the comparison classes they employ.

2.3 Scales and Such

The reader might have noticed that, in scenarios liked those discussed in §2.2, the disputants are likely to agree upon a scale to measure poverty (e.g., say, income) or fatness (e.g. dress size), or so on—despite differing with respect to the comparison class. Indeed, it might be argued that disputes *do* concern the value of a cutoff point along a given scale; the only notable feature of these disputes, as compared to those discussed in §1.1, is that the speakers’ difference in opinion as to the appropriate cutoff point stems from a difference in opinion as to the appropriate comparison class. Finally, though, I will argue that FD-Shape can result even when disputants apply a vague predicate

according to different scales, dimensions, or measures.⁴⁶

Note, for example, that FD-Shaped disputes can arise between individuals who disagree with respect to the appropriate property to measure when assessing whether a person is “fat” (e.g., say, BMI, body fat percentage, or clothing size). Indeed, molecular imaging professor Jimmy Bell has argued that ‘fat’ should be defined so as to apply to individuals with excessive *internal fat*—regardless of size or BMI.⁴⁷ Suppose that Mark is what Bell calls a “thin outside, fat inside” individual (or “TOFI”)—a normal weight man with a large amount of internal fat—and consider this fictional exchange between Dr. Bell and a more traditional ‘fat’-user:

(12) Average Joe:
Mark is not fat.

Dr. Bell:
Yes, he is.

Quite plausibly, (12) possesses FD-Shape. Clearly, Dr. Bell is not disposed to defer to speakers like Joe; he explicitly wants to reform ordinary conceptions of fatness.

Meanwhile, it is likely that Joe would not be amenable to adopting Dr. Bell’s usage of ‘fat’, even in light of information about internal fat and its health dangers, Dr. Bell’s credentials, and so on. Dr. Bell’s definition of ‘fat’ seems irrelevant to other concerns of

⁴⁶ The latter choice seems largely independent from the selection of a comparison class; a ‘fat’-user, for example, must decide *both* what property she wants to measure to assess individuals’ fatness (e.g. weight, BMI, body fat percentage, etc.) *and* within which population she is interested in measuring this property (e.g. fashion models or American women).

⁴⁷ On Dr. Jimmy Bells and “TOFIs,” see (e.g.) “Thin People Can Be Fat Inside,” The Associated Press (May 11, 2007) <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18594089/ns/health-fitness/t/thin-people-can-be-fat-inside/>>, accessed June 10, 2013.

ordinary speakers who use ‘fat’ (e.g. aesthetic concerns), in addition to being simply too difficult to apply on a day-to-day basis. Mark and other TOFIs certainly don’t look fat—and it is infeasible to go about subjecting others to molecular imaging to determine who is fat. Given these intuitions about Dr. Bell and Joe’s lack of deference, Faultlessness Analogue obtains.

What about Disagreement Analogue? Once again, it seems clear that Dr. Bell realizes that Average Joe applies ‘fat’ to individuals on the basis of the assessment of a different property (i.e. one more easily observed by the naked eye than a person’s amount of internal fat); Dr. Bell knows that his use of ‘fat’ is uncommon—but he promotes it as an improvement over the ordinary usage. It is precisely Dr. Bell’s point to emphasize that TOFIs like Mark *are* fat in the way that matters—appearances notwithstanding. Thus, knowledge of a difference in standards of application does not cause Dr. Bell to refrain from disputing Joe. Given that Dr. Bell induces Contradiction Shape despite this knowledge, and that it is hard to think of what other information would have caused him not to reply in this manner, Disagreement Analogue holds in (12).

In (12), the tension between Dr. Bell and Joe arises due to different conceptions of what scale (no pun intended) should be used to measure “fatness.” This, I assume, might provide a nice example of what Kennedy has in mind in the remarks quoted in §1.2, where he conjectures that “uncertainty about dimensions of evaluation” is the core source of faultless disagreement. There are other cases, however, in which a disputant might argue that there is more to having a certain graded property than simply achieving some degree along a scale (*any* scale). Consider, for instance, this dispute over the application

of the perennial favorite vague predicate ‘bald’:

- (13) Alderman’s target (possibly a philosopher who writes on vagueness?):
This man [with a completely shaved head] is bald.

Alderman:

These men [Bruce Willis, Michael Chikless, Michael Jordan, Yul Brynner] *are not bald*—well, I mean, they *are* bald—but they are actually covering it up by taking it all *off*, which puts them in a completely different category called “shave-head,” which is all-scalp-all-the-time, which makes it an *elective*, not a genetic imperative. ... It is *not* bald [emphases in original].⁴⁸

Quite clearly, Alderman’s complaint in (13) is not that other speakers employ an inappropriately high or low cutoff point for the amount of hair needed to count as “bald” (nor that they have in mind the wrong comparison class); on the contrary, he is emphatic that even a total *absence* of hair is insufficient to qualify an individual as “bald.” What is important, on his view, is not *how much* hair is missing—by any manner of counting hairs—but *why* the hair is gone. It is essential, according to Alderman, that the hair loss has happened for *biological* reasons; hair loss due to shaving, for example, does not constitute “baldness.”

Although I will not rehearse the arguments (which, by this point, the reader can no doubt anticipate), it seems that (13) manifests FD-Shape; Alderman knows that other speakers apply ‘bald’ according to different standards than he does, but he rejects these standards (and, correspondingly, any particular classification of shaved-head individuals as “bald”). What is interesting about (13) is that—despite the use of a canonical vague

⁴⁸ Tom Alderman, “Bald Is *Not* Beautiful: Confessions From the Fringe-Worthy,” Huff Post Style (Nov 18, 2010) <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-alderman/bald-is-not-beautiful-con_b_785487.html>, accessed Sep 23, 2012.

predicate—the dispute itself seems to have little to do with vagueness. Indeed, the same dispute could arise even if ‘bald’ were *not* vague. Suppose that we stipulate a precise amount of hair that marks an individual as bald; this doesn’t seem to matter to the controversy in (13)—since, presumably, Alderman and his opponents would still disagree about whether an individual with a completely shaved head (but no genetic disposition for hair loss) is bald. (Obviously, *no* hair is lower than any cutoff point that could be stipulated.) Thus, although ‘bald’ is vague, this fact seems to do no work in explaining the dispute in (13).

Even though the vagueness of ‘bald’ does not seem to be the prime contributor, however, it is clear that Alderman and his adversaries are committed to using ‘bald’ according to different standards of application—and this alone, as noted in §2.1, is what appears to be crucial to secure Faultlessness Analogue. Moreover, as (13) demonstrates, Disagreement Analogue can also arise in disputes that do not seem to turn on vagueness. It should come as little surprise, then, that many predicates can be used in FD-Shaped disputes despite not appearing to be vague at all.⁴⁹

3. Other Predicates: Non-Dimensional, Non-Evaluative, Non-Subjective

At the conclusion of §2, we encountered evidence that *vagueness* does not seem to lie at

⁴⁹ We might also note that *evaluativity* does not appear to be the issue in the cases analyzed in §2.3. Both Dr. Bell and Alderman apparently take themselves to employ objective, scientifically respectable methods to determine whether individuals are fat and bald (respectively). Their opponents, meanwhile, might also employ apparently non-subjective criteria for classifying individuals (e.g. scales, rulers, or BMIs charts in the first case and, say, precise hair-counts in the latter).

the root of FD-Shape—even after expanding our scope to disputes over the “dimensions of evaluation” rather than merely cutoff points along these dimensions—since certain FD-Shaped disputes, like (13), are apparently not to be explained by vagueness at all. From this point, it should not be difficult to notice that FD-Shape arises in exchanges involving a variety of predicates—many of which seem to be neither evaluative *nor* vague. This section enumerates a few examples thereof.

Let’s begin with a debate cited by Peter Ludlow in the course of making the point that many disputes like our cases of interest “have little to do with vagueness” (2008, p. 118):

- (14) Doug [response to a thread “Secretariat” under “The Best 100 Athletes”]: This [Secretariat] is a horse not an athlete! This animal was faster than the other horses but nothing else. It would have done anything if it was not for the human (athlete) on its back.

Gary G:

To the idiot that stated that Secretariat is not an athlete, he most certainly is [an athlete] and one of the best, for his information, Secretariat was ridden with a hand ride, meaning he dictated his own pace.⁵⁰

Ludlow, with reference to an example similar to (14), states: “It is not as though the dispute would be resolved if Secretariat were a little bit faster or could throw a baseball, so it seems hard to imagine that these are vagueness cases” (p. 118). I think this assessment is correct: presumably, it is Doug’s position that ‘athlete’ should apply only to humans—and there is surely no uncertainty as to whether a horse is “human enough” to qualify.

⁵⁰ “Secretariat,” The Best 100 Athletes
<<http://www.thebest100lists.com/best100athletes/Secretariat.html>>; accessed June 14, 2013.

I also agree with Ludlow that exchanges like (14) are akin to more familiar examples of faultless disagreement. Note, specifically, that (14) meets our condition of FD-Shape: it does not seem that either Doug or Gary G is simply missing relevant information, nor does it seem that Gary G would be disposed to refrain from denying Doug’s claim. Of course, I presume that some philosophers might argue that Doug and Gary G use ‘athlete’ with a different meaning—but, as stressed in §2.1, this diagnosis in itself does nothing to undercut Disagreement Analogue. Note here that Gary G presumably recognizes that Doug believes that only humans are eligible to qualify as “athletes” (given that he is writing in reply to Doug’s post), but this recognition does not lead Gary G to refrain from invoking Contradiction Shape—even when coupled with the information that, according to philosophers, this apparently robust difference suggests that Doug and Gary G are merely using the word ‘athlete’ differently.

Certain paradigmatic “merely verbal” disputes provide other exemplary cases of FD-Shaped disputes in which the predicates used seem neither evaluative nor vague (in Kennedy’s senses).⁵¹

- (15) Bbarton713 begins a thread called “My own martini” in which (s)he describes a recipe for a cocktail made with gin, lime juice, elderflower cordial, bitters, basil, and mint.

PozzSka:

No offense meant, but that isn’t a Martini. It’s a cocktail of some kind, made with gin. However, for those who don’t like actual Martini’s, it seems a little more user-friendly.

⁵¹ Karen Bennett uses a “martini” argument much like (15) as a paradigm case of a “merely verbal dispute” (2009, pp. 50-52). (See also Sider 2012.) On ‘planet’ and ‘fish’, see, especially, Chalmers (2011).

Jmallen5:

Haven't you seen the restaurant drink menus lately? If you can serve it in a Martini glass, it's a Martini! :lol.⁵²

- (16) Linnaeus:
Whales are not fish. (They are mammals.)

Ishmael:

I take the good old fashioned ground that the whale is a fish, and call upon holy Jonah to back me.⁵³

- (17) International Astronomical Union (in 2006):
Pluto is not a planet. (It is a "dwarf planet" or "plutoid.")

Will Galmot (3rd grade) in a letter to astronomers:
You are missing planet Pluto. ... It is a planet.

Emerson York (3rd grade) in a letter to astronomers:
I think Pluto is a planet. Why do you think Pluto is no longer a planet? I do not like your anser!!! ... Pluto IS a planet!!!!!!⁵⁴

It should be apparent that—whether or not they are “merely verbal” in some sense (I will discuss this issue further in Chapter 4)—(15), (16), and (17) manifest FD-Shape.

Presumably, those who intuit that such disputes *are* “merely verbal” share the intuitions underlying Faultlessness Analogue—which, as noted in §2.1, seems to hold whenever two speakers appear robustly disposed to apply a predicate according to different criteria of application. It is worth clarifying here that, in saying that the speakers are “robustly disposed” to apply the predicate differently, I mean that—for one—neither

⁵² “My own martini,” Badger and Blade (May 12-17, 2011)

<<http://badgerandblade.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-207752.html?s=e3e7ab016f52b4618f327a1933ad8606>>, accessed Sep 23, 2012.

⁵³ Chalmers cites this passage from Chapter 32 of *Moby Dick* (2011, p. 519).

⁵⁴ “Third-Grade Students to Scientist: Pluto Is too a Planet!” Discoblog. Discover Magazine (March 12, 2010)
<<http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/discoblog/2010/03/12/third-grade-students-to-scientist-pluto-is-too-a-planet/>>, accessed Sep 23, 2012.

speaker would be convinced to adopt the other's usage in light of information about the criteria by which certain authorities or experts apply the word. This is particularly pertinent in the cases of (16) and (17)—given that ordinary speakers might be often assumed to defer to scientists with respect to the “correct” use of ‘fish’, ‘planet’, or other purported “natural kind” terms.⁵⁵ Exchanges like (16) and (17), however, demonstrate that deference to the scientific community cannot be taken for granted. On the contrary, disputes might arise due to friction between traditional and modern, scientifically-based taxonomies. This is not to say that deference is entirely *absent*—only that deference might be to *other* purported authorities. The third-graders in (17), for instance, probably deferred to their teachers or parents—but their teachers and parents most likely encouraged these children's resistance to the demotion of Pluto from its “planet” status. Similarly, in (16), Ishmael evidently defers to the authors of the Bible; like the third-graders in (17), he effectively accuses the scientists of disrespecting a time-honored taxonomy—and those authorities who devised *it*—through their newfangled classificatory schemes.

Meanwhile, the argument in support of Disagreement Analogue in (15), (16), and (17), follows the model that should now be quite familiar. Once again, we can even grant that the respective speakers mean different things by ‘martini’, ‘fish’, and ‘planet’; the relevant point is that knowledge of this difference in meaning would probably *not* cause the respondent in each of these disputes to fail to reply in a way that induces Contradiction Shape. Indeed, in such cases, speakers typically *are* willing to

⁵⁵ Cf. Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979).

acknowledge that they differ in how they are defining their terms; however, they consider these differences to be important and worth disputing—and they consider the “shape” of contradiction to be felicitous in such disputes (irrespective of whether there is a “genuine” semantic contradiction between their utterances). (I will return to this point in §4.) I take it, then, that—merely verbal or not—the above disputes exemplify FD-Shape. Thus, although such examples have seldom been classified with cases of supposed faultless disagreement, they seem to share the same basic features that lie at the foundation of disagreement-based arguments against traditional truth-conditional semantics.

Finally, we should stress that, as in (14), the presence of FD-Shape in (15), (16), and (17) does not seem attributable to vagueness—nor, of course, to evaluativity (since terms like ‘fish’ and ‘planet’ are presumably non-evaluative if any are). Take (17). On the traditional view, a celestial body is either a planet or not; specifically, according to speakers like Will Galmot and Emerson York, x is a planet iff x is Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, or Pluto. There is nothing like a graded property of “planetiness,” some degree of which a celestial body to meet in order to satisfy ‘is a planet’.⁵⁶ Relatedly, it does not seem that the tension in (15)—over whether a concoction

⁵⁶ The IAU’s definition of ‘planet’ might allow more room for vagueness (e.g. what counts as “nearly round”?): “A planet is a celestial body that (a) has sufficient mass for its self-gravity to overcome rigid body forces so that it assumes a hydrostatic equilibrium (nearly round) shape, and (b) is in orbit around a star, and is neither a star nor a satellite of a planet.” (Cf. “Planet Definition Questions and Answers Sheet.” International Astronomical Union. <http://www.iau.org/public_press/news/release/iau0601/q_answers/>, accessed Sep 23, 2012.)

with elderflower cordial, bitters, basil and mint is a martini—can be attributed to different opinions concerning what degree of “martinness” must be possessed by a drink in order to count as a martini. Instead, purists like PozzSka operate with one strict definition of ‘martini’ (e.g. “a cocktail made with 3 parts gin to 1 part dry Vermouth, stirred, and served in a v-shaped glass”), while corruptionists⁵⁷ like Bbarton713 might operate with another strict—albeit more encompassing—definition (e.g. “a cocktail served in a v-shaped glass”).

This might begin to suggest that there are no principled limits on what predicates can occur in FD-Shaped disputes. Indeed, the phenomenon can be observed with respect to the same predicates that notable theorists have presented as stereotypical predicates that do *not* give rise to faultless disagreement effects.⁵⁸

(18) Jolinda Hackeet (About.com Guide):
Readers Respond: Is cheese vegetarian?

Vanessa:

Off course cheese is vegetarian. I believe that anything which don't have blood in them are vegetarian.

tofuchik:

No. ... It necessitates animals dying (dairy cows are sent to slaughter at around 5 years of age), but the rennet is from the very calves who were taken away from their mothers so humans could take the milk meant for

Recall, however, that the specifics of the IAU's definition seemed to play little or no role in disputes like (17); advocates of Pluto's planet-status would have rejected any redefinition of 'planet' that ousted Pluto—vague or not vague.

⁵⁷ ...or whatever the antonym of 'purist' is.

⁵⁸ Kennedy accepts 'is vegetarian' (as applied to food) as an example of a predicate that is not “subjective” (where he uses faultless disagreement as a diagnostic for subjectivity) (cf. 2013, p. 266). MacFarlane (2014) and Lasersohn (2005) use 'is a cookie' and 'is a doctor', respectively, as examples of predicates that presumably do not enter into the disagreement phenomena that they engineer their semantic proposals to accommodate.

the baby cows.⁵⁹

- (19) A [cited as “common belief”]:
Chiropractors are not real doctors.

Chiropractic Awareness Council:

[I]s a chiropractor a real doctor? Absolutely! A real doctor with a unique purpose. What your doctor of chiropractic can offer, no other doctor can.⁶⁰

- (20) Celtor:
Just for the fun of it, what’s your favorite type of cookie?

Mishy:

I refuse to vote because fig newtons are not cookies.

Marnevel:

Fig newtons are cookies.⁶¹

I claim that (18), (19), and (20) are further examples of FD-Shape—but I trust that the reader is now sufficiently familiar with my general procedure for eliciting the relevant intuitions that there is no need to defend this claim explicitly. Generalizing upon our preceding examples, I will now argue that there are principled reasons to conclude that *any* predicate can be used in such a dispute.

⁵⁹ Jolinda Hackett, “Readers Respond: Is cheese vegetarian,” About.com Vegetarian Food <<http://vegetarian.about.com/u/ua/healthnutrition/Is-Cheese-Vegetarian-What-Do-You-Think.htm>>, accessed June 10, 2013.

Those who are not familiar with the controversy behind examples like (18) should note that, while cheese is commonly thought to be vegetarian (since it is not meat), much cheese contains rennet—obtained from the stomach lining of slaughtered calves (i.e., unlike milk, it is obtained in a way that necessitates the death of an animal). This leads to differences of opinion, especially within the vegetarian community itself, as to whether rennet-containing cheese is “vegetarian.”

⁶⁰ Chiropractic Awareness Council of Ontario

<<http://www.chiropracticawarenesscouncil.org/myths.html>>, accessed Sep 23, 2012

⁶¹ “Cookies!” Skotos Forums (Aug 8, 2005) <<http://forum.skotos.net/archive/index.php/t-48984.html>>, accessed June 10, 2013. (The comments suggests that contributors to the thread were given a choice of options for their favorite cookies; however, no options were given when the site was accessed.)

4. No Predicate Is Immune

I maintain that any predicate can be used in an FD-Shaped dispute—and, moreover, this is not because all predicates happens to share a certain lexical or semantic property that renders them admissible for such use (for, as we will see below, it seems that even such general semantic properties as *having an undetermined extension* are not necessary⁶²). Instead, the potentiality for use in an FD-Shape dispute is something imposed upon a word by its users—and there are no principled bounds on which predicates speakers might decide to employ in such a dispute.

In establishing the above claim, we should begin by noting that the following two conditions are sufficient to permit that a given predicate ‘F’ may occur in an FD-Shaped dispute:

- (i) There are two speakers, A and B, who use ‘F’ according to different standards of application (where it is not the case that A and B are disposed to defer to the same standard or authority with respect to the proper use of ‘F’);
- (ii) B has reason to call attention to the discrepancy between A and B’s standards for applying ‘F’ by inducing Contradiction Shape.

Condition (i) suffices to establish the possibility of Faultlessness Analogue, since it predicts that A and B will robustly differ in their willingness to apply ‘F’ in cases where their conditions of application diverge. Condition (ii) secures the possibility that

⁶² Contra, perhaps, Ludlow (2008, 2014)—who, despite denying that vagueness is the source of the disagreement phenomena (cf. §3), maintains that semantic indeterminacy *is*.

Disagreement Analogue can obtain—and, specifically, obtain *despite Faultlessness Analogue*. In the remainder of this paper, I argue that conditions (i) and (ii) can, in principle, be satisfied by any predicate. This, in turn, suffices to show that no predicate is immune from use in an FD-Shaped dispute.

It should already be clear, in light of the earlier commentary in §2.1, that Faultlessness Analogue is quite easily attained. As mentioned in passing, the condition is met even in cases of dialectical variation or mere ambiguity; it would be satisfied, for instance, if A is a member of a community in which ‘F’ is strictly used to refer to fluorine, B is a member of a community in which ‘F’ is strictly used to refer to failing grades, and both A and B use ‘F’ differentially to members of their own speech communities. Furthermore, even in the unlikely event that all speakers initially adopt the same standards of application for ‘F’, the condition can be met if a speaker willfully breaks from tradition and applies ‘F’ on the basis of different conditions.

To illustrate the latter possibility, we might consider a “worst case scenario” in which all speakers unanimously defer to the same experts with respect to the correct use of ‘F’, these experts themselves agree on how to use ‘F’, and the agreed-upon application conditions for ‘F’ are fully determined (i.e. they issue a decisive verdict on every case)—thereby leaving no room for subjective discretion. Mathematical predicates, perhaps, provide the closest real-world approximation to this worst case scenario: nearly all lay speakers defer to mathematicians for their proper use, and mathematicians tend to present formal definitions that permit little or no indeterminacy. But even this does not foreclose on the possibility of robust divergence in application conditions (and, hence,

Faultlessness Analogue)—since it does not rule out the possibility that speakers might choose to flout conventional use.

Assume, for example, that all English speakers in 2020 use ‘is an odd number’ according to the rule “Apply ‘is an odd number’ to x iff x is an integer and x is not divisible by 2.” This does nothing to exclude the possibility that, in 2021, a few maverick mathematicians will decide that ‘is an odd number’ should *not* include 1, and stubbornly adopt the application condition “Apply ‘is an odd number’ to x iff x is an integer and x is not divisible by 2 *and* x is not 1.” Disputes with these maverick speakers as to whether 1 is an odd number would presumably manifest Faultlessness Analogue. And it is easy to generalize from this worst case scenario: if B willfully decides to apply ‘F’ differently from others in B’s community, then Faultlessness Analogue can arise in exchanges in which ‘F’ is ascribed (viz. exchanges between B and other members of B’s community)—irrespective of any specific semantic properties of ‘F’. It seems, then, that no predicate is in principle barred from exchanges manifesting Faultlessness Analogue.

The next question is perhaps more interesting: can *Disagreement Analogue* also arise for an exchange involving any arbitrary predicate—and, specifically, can it arise for an exchange involving any arbitrary predicate *given that* Faultlessness Analogue and Competence Constraint are also met? I submit that this question can indeed be answered affirmatively—as reflection on the examples presented throughout this paper should help to confirm. I believe that, for any predicate ‘F’, it is possible to conceive of situations in which an evidently competent speaker might willingly invoke Contradiction Shape in rejecting another’s ascription of ‘F’ *despite recognizing that the difference in judgement*

amounts merely to a difference in the conditions by which the respective speakers apply 'F'. In developing this claim, I wish to highlight two possible rationales for invoking Contradiction Shape in spite of such a divergence in application conditions: first, B might deny A's ascription of 'F' in order to attempt to "negotiate" common standards for applying 'F'; second, B might deny A's ascription of 'F' in order to generate rhetorical force in the service of some other aim. Either rationale could potentially apply to any predicate—depending, it seems, only on contingent facts about speakers' interests in using it.

One theoretical approach to many of our examples of FD-Shaped disputes—which seems lately to be enjoying a surge in popularity—holds that participants in these activities “do not simply exchange factual information about language, but rather negotiate its appropriate use and the associated choice of concepts” (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a, p. 262).⁶³ Consider (22)—in which A and B dispute whether tap water with a 1.2 ppm fluoride concentration is “poisonous.” Here, it seems, A and B are attempting to determine how much fluoride should be permitted in municipal tap water; negotiating standards for applying ‘poisonous’ seems to have ramifications for regulatory standards for fluoride concentration. For another example, recall (19)—wherein the Chiropractic Awareness Council denies the claim that “Chiropractors are not doctors.” Their response, I think, is plausibly described as an attempt to convince detractors to broaden their

⁶³ For notable defenses of this conception of certain FD-Shaped disputes, see Ludlow (2008, 2014), Richard (2008, esp. Chapter 4), Plunkett and Sundell (2013a, b), and Barker (2013). Egan (2010) defends a related position with respect to some disputes of taste.

concept of “doctorhood” (and the extension of ‘doctor’) to include chiropractors.

Regarding (8), moreover, one might plausibly interpret speakers like Robert—who speak out in protest of the President’s usage of ‘rich’—as advocating in favor of a higher cutoff point for applying the predicate (e.g., especially, due to its ramifications for tax policy). And, in (12), Dr. Bell wishes to reform to the common usage of ‘fat’. Examples, of course, could be multiplied.

Now, importantly, there seem to be no necessary constraints on the types of predicates that are used in such instances of negotiation; a consequence is that Disagreement Analogue can also obtain even in our previously discussed “worst case scenarios” for Faultlessness Analogue. Take, again, our ‘odd number’ example—in which a maverick speaker attempts to “reform” use of this predicate. Suppose that our maverick mathematician asserts “1 is not odd.” A respondent might well reply “No, that’s wrong; 1 *is* odd” *even if* she realizes that the maverick speaker has obstinately coined his own usage of ‘odd number’. Presumably, she wants to bring him back in line with ordinary usage of ‘odd number’. Likewise, the maverick might insist “Nuh-uh; 1 is *not* odd!” in attempt to gain adherents to his new usage. In either case, invoking Contradiction Shape might be effective in conveying, roughly, “There’s only room enough for one definition of ‘odd number’ is this community (and it ought to be mine).” (I take it that this is what Contradiction Shape typically conveys in instances of negotiation—substituting, of course, ‘odd number’.) Moreover, as the preceding example demonstrates, “room to negotiate” is not something that must be built into the semantics of the predicate whose meaning is up for negotiation (e.g. through vagueness or

underdetermination). It is sufficient that there are speakers who undertake to change the way in which ‘F’ is used in their community; this ambition of speakers is an extra-semantic factor that could, in principle, apply to any predicate—including predicates (like, plausibly, ‘is an odd number’) that are initially defined to admit no vagueness or indeterminacy.

As I will argue in the next chapter, however, many disputes like our motivating examples in this chapter are *not* plausibly described as instances of “negotiation.” Indeed, I claim that—like the disputes about taste discussed in the first two chapters—many of these disputes are also best explained in terms of “feigning objectivity” for rhetorical effect. I will not outline this account in detail yet—but we can already see, I think, that it provides *another* route by which to argue that FD-Shape can, in principle, arise for disputes over the application of *any* predicate. Drawing upon the proposal in Chapter 2, we can note there is an additional—and perhaps even more generalizable—rationale for adopting the syntax associated with logical contradiction (i.e. Contradiction Shape): speakers might employ Contradiction Shape for its rhetorical effect, even in situations in which speakers do not express contradictory propositions. As emphasized in Chapter 2, these syntactic features implicitly evoke disagreement about matters of fact. Thus, when B invokes Contradiction Shape, B effectively frames A as employing a false theory of the property *F-ness*, as bad at detecting *F-ness*, as ignorant about what does and does not instantiate *F-ness*, or the like—as opposed to merely using ‘F’ to denote a different property. The latter charge, of course, sounds quite minor in comparison to the former—especially given that B might be forced to concede that A speaks *truly* given the meaning

of ‘F’ in A’s idiolect.

Hence, even if A and B do not really express contradictory beliefs, the impact of B’s utterance can be strengthened by presenting the *appearance* that they do. This, in turn, can be useful when B wishes to implicitly evaluate A (due to what A’s standards for applying ‘F’ reveal about A) or A’s standards for applying ‘F’ themselves. This is, I think, what is indeed observed in many stereotypical merely verbal disputes—including (15), (16), (17), where the differences between the speakers’ application conditions reflect affectively-laden differences between the speakers’ interests and values. Cocktail purists, like PozzSka in (15), often detest the classification of cocktails based on superficial criteria like type of glassware—which seems to betray a lack of appreciation for classic beverages. And, as stressed in §3, reactions of lay speakers to scientific reclassifications—as in (16) and (17)—can become quite emotionally charged, as speakers perceive the scientists as undervaluing traditions of importance to them.

The first point of note is that, if B employs Contradiction Shape merely for its rhetorical force, then B’s decision should be immune to potential “counterevidence” that points to the conclusion that A and B merely express truths in the respective idiolects. Thus, Disagreement Analogue can hold when the rhetorical effect of framing a dispute *as* a dispute about “the hard facts” is useful to the respondent. The second point is that, again, there seem to be no principled bounds on what predicates speakers might choose to implicate in the phenomenon. Indeed, it seems, we can observe a similar rationale for invoking Contradiction Shape even in situations in which ‘F’ is ambiguous between dialectics, and B wants to tease A about A’s use of ‘F’—not unlike what occurs in (21),

an exchange between an American and Australian:

- (21) EDITH:
Well, these guys [the researchers] are gonna count how many biscuits we eat too.
- JENNY:
Stop calling them “biscuits”. ... They’re cookies. Biscuits are like – ...
- EDITH:
This [cookie] is a biscuit.⁶⁴

When a speaker uses a dialectically ambiguous term like ‘biscuit’, that speaker might reveal her heritage to addressees and eavesdroppers—who, in turn, might find the dialectical difference amusing and worth teasing (or, if they are particularly jingoistic, worth belittling).

Note that the ambiguities like the American and British/Australian uses of ‘biscuit’ may result from mere historical contingencies that have little or nothing to do with the semantics of words like ‘biscuit’. (There are, I presume, no semantic constraints on what words of a natural language might become ambiguous across communities of speakers.) Given this, it seems that we have another expedient route—in addition to examination of maverick speaker / negotiation cases like our ‘odd number’ example—whereby to reach the conclusion that there are no semantic constraints on what predicates admit of use in FD-Shaped disputes (since, presumably, there are also no semantic constraints on teasing other speakers about the use of certain terms).

Of course, *mere* dialectical ambiguity, as in (21), seldom marks salient differences

⁶⁴ This example comes from a recorded dialogue quoted in Yu, Changrong (2012) “Emotional Display in Argument, Storytelling, and Teasing: A Multimodal Analysis,” University of Oulu Graduate School (pp. 145-6).

in value between two speakers—and, for *this* reason, it might be comparatively unlikely to provide impetus for speakers' engagement in FD-Shaped disputes. In contrast, when different uses of 'F' seem to reflect different precisifications of the same core concept (as, I assume, some might argue about the examples discussed in §§1-3), these differences are much more likely also to reflect differences in speakers' values and interests—as in the “merely verbal” disputes mentioned above (and to be discussed to greater extent in Chapter 4). Plausibly, B is more likely to contest A's application of 'F' when A uses 'F' according to *similar* criteria but (in B's eyes) doesn't get it quite right—when, for example, A attends to the “wrong” features in picking out martinis, doctors, bald people, or vegetarian food.

The general point, which I will pursue in greater depth in the next chapter, is simply this: if B wants to be particularly emphatic in conveying that B does not share A's heritage, perspective, values, or other distinctions that are made manifest by A's different use of 'F' (and, perhaps, to convey that B considers *B's* side to be *superior* to A's), B may invoke Contradiction Shape in replying to A—thereby exploiting the rhetorical force of framing the dispute as one about the “hard facts.” What is important to note for the purposes of this chapter is simply that “feigning objectivity” provides an alternative, or additional, route to explain why Disagreement Analogue can hold despite Faultlessness Analogue and Competence Constraint—and why this combination of features can obtain for any predicate.

5. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that any predicate has potential to be used in an FD-Shaped dispute—and, moreover, that all predicates possess this potential in virtue of non-semantic factors that could afflict any term of natural language. This finding has several important ramifications for future work in the semantics and pragmatics of alleged faultless disagreement.

First, I argued in Chapter 1 that (assuming Truth Norm and Contradiction Norm) the condition FD-Shape is sufficient to motivate the problems for traditional semantics that have been alleged to arise due to faultless disagreement. However, while most current approaches to faultless disagreement attribute the phenomenon to the properties of certain predicates (such as evaluativity or vagueness), I have demonstrated that *any* predicate can be used in an FD-Shaped dispute. One conclusion to draw here is simply that theorists must be clearer in identifying the phenomenon of interest. Plausibly, many would deny that stereotypical “merely verbal” disputes (cf. §3)—let alone cases of teasing over one another’s use of ‘biscuit’ (cf. §4)—*are* instances of the relevant phenomenon. But if this is so, then these theorists must clarify what—beyond the features that FD-Shape comprises—are the relevant attributes of the phenomenon that *does* interest them.

Moreover, if FD-Shape does suffice as a distillation of the semantically-relevant features of purported cases of faultless disagreement, then the present investigation has significant implications for semantic approaches to the phenomenon. First, the conclusion that no predicate is immune from use in an FD-Shaped dispute should lead us to question—and, without further conditions, *reject*—the use of “faultless disagreement” as

a diagnostic to discriminate between objective and subjective predicates (as assumed by, e.g., Kennedy 2013, and argued for explicitly by Wright 1992). Additionally, although properties like vagueness and evaluativity arguably contribute to faultless disagreement (precisified as FD-Shape), their role in explaining the phenomenon seems small if not negligible. For one, in an explanation of why the disagreement effects are *possible* for a given predicate, appeals to specific semantic or lexical properties of the predicate are not necessary—given that *any* predicate, simply in virtue of being a predicate, can participate in the phenomenon

To be sure, vagueness and evaluativity can contribute to the interpersonal differences in standards of application that *are* necessary for the phenomenon of interest; given that differences in standards of application *exist*, however, the precise semantic nature of their difference holds comparatively little importance in explaining why FD-Shape is possible. In other words, facts about the specific nature of the difference in standards of applications are explanatorily screened off by the fact that such a difference exists *at all* (in conjunction with the fact there are speakers in the community who are robustly disposed to cling to their preferred standards of application, without deferring to experts or others in the community). Moreover, the *meaning* of predicates surely matters in explaining specific instances of FD-Shape; this will become particularly clear in Chapter 4 when we analyze the role of value differences in understanding why speakers sometimes “feign objectivity.” *Meaning*, however, is certainly not all that theorists have traditionally had in mind when seeking explanations of faultless disagreement in terms of semantic properties.

In fact, it seems that it is not semantic or pragmatic facts about *the predicates* used in an FD-Shaped dispute that explain why, as a general matter, Disagreement Analogue can occur despite Faultlessness Analogue—but, instead, facts about admissible use of *negation*. Denial of others’ utterances can be felicitously used in the context of “negotiating” common application conditions for predicates; it can also be used in, as I have stressed, “feigning objectivity” to lend intensive and emphasis to implicit (or explicit) expressions of evaluation. Other theorists have already remarked upon the former; the latter proposal, as far as I can tell, is novel. In Chapter 4, I will argue that, in fact, the latter provides a more accurate description of most cases like those laid out in the present chapter.

Chapter 4: Classification and Implicit Evaluation

In Chapter 3, I argued that no predicate is immune from use in disputes that manifest FD-Shape. In doing so, I invoked examples that—in other philosophical contexts—have been presented as canonical examples of “merely verbal disputes.” Consider, for example, the following dialogues:

- (10) MILF Mommy:
Size 12, you’re fat!

Mayay:
OMG!! A size 12 is NOT fat by all means.

- (15) Bbarton713 begins a thread called “My own martini” in which (s)he describes a recipe for a cocktail made with gin, lime juice, elderflower cordial, bitters, basil, and mint.

PozzSka:
No offense meant, but that isn’t a Martini. It’s a cocktail of some kind, made with gin. However, for those who don’t like actual Martini’s, it seems a little more user-friendly.

Jmallen5:
Haven’t you seen the restaurant drink menus lately? If you can serve it in a Martini glass, it’s a Martini! :lol:

- (17) International Astronomical Union (in 2006):
Pluto is not a planet. (It is a “dwarf planet” or “plutoid.”)

Will Galmot (3rd grade) in a letter to astronomers:
You are missing planet Pluto. ... It is a planet.

Emerson York (3rd grade) in a letter to astronomers:
I think Pluto is a planet. Why do you think Pluto is no longer a planet? I do not like your anser!!! ... Pluto IS a planet!!!!!!

- (23) Korean teacher [in 65° weather]:
Chu-wo! [trans. “Oh, it’s cold!”]

lasoro70:

18C is about 65 F and I find the temperature just about perfect. However, all I hear from the Korean teachers around me is “Chu-wo/ 추워!” (“Oh, it’s cold!”). There is one particular teacher who sits behind me who has been saying it about 5 times a day this week. ... 15-20 degrees is not cold! -10 C degrees is cold!⁶⁵

- (24) Destro700: [in reference to a song by Nine Inch Nails]
To all those imagining that this is Dubstep, Please Note THIS IS NOT DUBSTEP, IT’S INDUSTRIAL.

DV8RZ:

throbbing gristle & Einsturzende Neubauten are industrial. Nine Inch Nails is just a pop rock band with synths and drum machines. Trent has never claimed to be industrial & his music resembles industrial in no way at all.⁶⁶

“Faultless disagreements” and “merely verbal disputes” have commonly differed in their role within philosophy. While the former have often been thought to reveal a need for revision of traditional truth-conditional semantics, the latter have more frequently been invoked (especially in metametaphysics) as alleged examples of disputes in which both speakers are correct and which, therefore, are not “genuine” or “substantive” disputes. More recently, however, philosophers—such as, notably, Ludlow and Plunkett and Sundell—have begun to explore connections between both types of disputes.

The latter theorists have contested the common view that merely dismisses

⁶⁵ “Life in Korea” forum <<http://waygook.org/index.php?topic=22528.0;wap2>>, accessed Jul 14, 2013.

⁶⁶ Comments on “NIN: The Great Destroyer live in Europe, Aug 2007 [HQ].” YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=06hCku23WiE&page=1>, accessed Sep 23, 2012.

exchanges like (10), (15), and (17) as dialogues in which the disputants are “talking past one another” and “don’t really disagree” and that, therefore, are disputes that are not worth pursuing (or, minimally, disputes that ought neither be studied nor imitated by philosophers). Theorists like Ludlow and Plunkett and Sundell have sought further insight into why speakers engage in such activities—and, importantly, why it is often *rational* to do so. On their charitable interpretation, the speakers engaged in so-called “merely verbal” disputes like (10), (15), and (17) are engaged in a process of implicitly “negotiating” common application conditions for their terms (e.g. ‘martini’ or ‘cold’)—an activity which is conversationally and socially important due to the fact that classificatory decisions often have important practical consequences. I believe, however, that this “negotiation view” (as I will call it) does not provide an accurate description of many of the core cases that the theorist should want to accommodate—including, most likely, (10), (15), (17), and other examples introduced in Chapter 3. Thus, if they are to be explained and rationalized, a different approach is needed. I believe that the idea of “feigning objectivity,” introduced in Chapter 2, provides the core of the requisite explanation—while also, as I explain in §5, accommodating cases in which the negotiation picture *does* seem apt.

In this chapter, I present an account on which speakers in many “merely verbal” disputes “feign contradiction” as a way to yield rhetorical force to a speech act that is, in essence, an implicit evaluation. Two key features of this view differentiate it from the predominant extant approaches to merely verbal disputes. First, I claim that the speaker who initiates the dispute does so, in large part, to express an evaluation of a target that is

set up by the first speaker in the exchange. When a speaker expresses a classificatory judgement, she might betray information about the classificatory scheme that she employs, which might in turn betray information about her values, interests, affiliations, or heritage—and these, finally, might themselves be evaluated by others in her linguistic community as better or worse values, interests, affiliations, or heritages. The second speakers in merely verbal disputes often implicitly express evaluations of one (or more) of the latter attributes, if not (also) of the subject of discussion itself (e.g. the cocktail, air temperature, or band Nine Inch Nails).

Second, following Chapter 2, I claim that the use of a direct denial of the initial utterance—which frames the initial speaker as though she were factual mistaken rather than simply using her words differently—provides rhetorical effect, signaling the resoluteness and intensity with which the second speaker favors his standards for applying the predicate over those of the first. In short, then, speakers are not necessarily misguided when they engage in argument despite the fact that, due to differences in word use, they do not express contradictory propositions; on the contrary, by framing the exchange *as if* they did, they might lend emphasis to an implicit evaluations.

The above analysis does not *rule out* negotiation—and, indeed, the posturing involving in “feigning contradiction” might be a means by which a speaker conveys authority for the sake of suggesting that *her own* standards are the “correct” ones. At the same time, though, my account extends to a much broader range of cases—including many that, while stereotypical of the phenomenon, are not aptly described as acts of negotiation.

1. The Dismissive Approach to Merely Verbal Disputes

Disputes like the above have been explicitly invoked in the philosophical literature on merely verbal disputes as paradigm cases of disputes that are trivial or non-substantive.⁶⁷

In (23) and (10), it appears that the disputants are just applying the vague terms ‘cold’ and ‘fat’ according to different cutoff points—and, in (15), it seems that the speakers are employing different definitions of ‘martini’ (both of which have become entrenched among different groups of speakers within our linguistic community). These do not seem to be disputes about “the way the world is,” if you will; the speakers in the respective disputes presumably do not disagree about the reading of the thermometer, or the approximate waist and hip measurements of the average size 12, or the ingredients contained in Barton⁷¹³’s cocktail. Instead, it seems, they merely disagree about whether to use ‘cold’, ‘fat’, and ‘martini’ *given* what the temperature, size, and ingredients actually are. Similarly, the famed controversy embodied in (17)—that is, whether ‘planet’ should be redefined in a way that turns out to exclude Pluto from its extension—seemed to concern the *meaning of ‘planet’* rather than the *nature of planets*. (Presumably, the third graders and their teachers and parents would not have contravened the

⁶⁷ Manley (2009), for one, references a dispute about whether the outdoor air temperature is “hot” as a stereotypical merely verbal dispute (pp. 8-9), as do Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, pp. 117-118). A dispute about whether an individual is “fat” is one of Sidelle’s many examples in his work on verbal disputes (2007, pp. 100-101). Bennett uses an argument about whether a certain fruity cocktail is a “martini” as her prototype of a merely verbal dispute (2009, pp. 50-52); Sider (2012) also seems fond of this example. Chalmers (2011), who uses the “manifestly verbal dispute among astronomers about whether Pluto is a planet” as one of his main cases (p. 25).

astronomers' assertion that Pluto differs from the other eight traditional planets in certain key respects; the divisive issue was whether it is acceptable to define the word 'planet' such that these differences matter as to whether a body is in its extension.)

For present purposes, I will adopt the label 'merely verbal disputes' to refer to disputes like these. I will assume that nothing hinges on the choice of label; most importantly, despite the often negative connotations of the label, I explicitly reject the view that such disputes are trivial or unimportant. While I will not presently attempt to provide an analysis of what merely verbal dispute *is*, it is important to highlight the fact—stressed in Chapter 3—that many alleged core cases of the phenomenon manifest FD Shape. This follows, in part, from typical assumptions about merely verbal disputes. Many theorists would hold that the presence of Faultlessness Analogue follows from the fact that, by definition, both speakers in a merely verbal dispute utter sentences that are *true* in their own language or context (cf., e.g., Hirsch (2005), who argues on the basis of charity that each party should agree that “there is a plausibly charitable interpretation of the language associated with the other side’s position which will make that position come out true” (p. 82)).

I argued in Chapter 3 that Disagreement Analogue and Competence Constraint also hold in cases like the above: the respondent in the exchange denies the utterance of the initial speaker, and this verbal behavior does *not* appear to due merely to ignorance or error. This is where theorists who take the “dismissive approach” to merely verbal

disputes are apt to disagree.⁶⁸ These theorists would contend that Faultlessness Analogue is evidence that the speakers express mutually true—and, *a fortiori*, *consistent* propositions—and that, therefore, the speakers are *mistaken* to talk as though they expressed contradictory propositions (i.e. by invoking Contradiction Shape). If the speakers are competent, then they would not invoke Contradiction Shape given evidence that they merely use their words differently and, moreover, *correctly* in their own respective idiolects; this would entail that Disagreement Analogue does not hold in merely verbal disputes. On the other hand, if the speakers *did* invoke Contradiction Shape despite this evidence, then they must not be competent—in violation of Competence Constraint. Or so the dismissive approach would have it. I believe, however, that this is simply to ignore the data (cf. my arguments in Chapter 3 that (10), (15), (17), etc., *do* simultaneously manifest Faultlessness Analogue, Disagreement Analogue, and Competence Constraint).

The dismissive approach to merely verbal disputes has gained prominence in metametaphysics, where interest centers on the question of whether certain disputes *within philosophy* (e.g. disputes about what “exists”) are themselves merely verbal. A common preconception in this literature is that *if* certain philosophical disputes are merely verbal, then these disputes should be abandoned or reformulated in other terms. In the literature in question, it is common to accept that disputes like the preceding are

⁶⁸ My presentation of the dismissive view draws upon the work of (for example) Hirsch (2005, 2009), Sidelle (2007), Bennett (2009), Chalmers (2011), Jenkins (2014), and Sider (2012). Cappelen and Hawthorne advance a similarly dismissive conception of disputes about whether outdoor temperatures are “hot” (2009, pp. 117-118).

exemplars of merely verbal disputes, and then to ask whether certain philosophical disputes are *like these*. Parties to these debates in metametaphysics are not primarily interested in providing a philosophical or linguistic account of the merely verbal disputes that arise in everyday discourse. Instead, they use examples drawn from the latter as training data, if you will, for theories of what constitutes a merely verbal dispute: they attempt to identify criteria that will correctly identify these commonplace disputes as “merely verbal” or not, according to their tutored intuitions, for the sake of applying these criteria to *philosophical* disputes. Although I will not address this point about philosophical debates *per se*, let’s briefly consider this view with respect to those everyday verbal disputes that provide the theorists with their training data.

Proponents of the dismissive approach sometimes assume that merely verbal disputes—whether they arise in philosophy or small talk—are silly or trivial. However, proponents of the dismissive approach can allow that issues surrounding the use of words can be highly important to speakers and society (and that, therefore, it is not necessarily the case that speakers will cease to care about the outcome of a dispute that they diagnose as merely verbal). What is characteristic of the dismissive approach, however, is that—if the meaning of words *does* matter—the form of merely verbal disputes is *misleading*: merely verbal disputes *misrepresent* the nature of the controversy as a dispute about whether *a* is F, rather than about whether ‘F’ does or should be used in a way such that ‘F’ applies to *a*. According to the dismissive approach, although the latter issue *might* be interesting and important, it is masked by the appearance of a debate about the former. Chalmers (2011), for example, argues that merely verbal disputes “can be resolved by

attending to language and resolving metalinguistic differences over meaning” (p. 11) and proposes a rather detailed method to do so—in which, significantly, the controversially-applied term is omitted from all sentences used in the debate. He claims that, once the offending term is removed, “residual substantive disagreements” are sometimes found to survive (p. 13).⁶⁹

The dismissive approach can thus allow, for example, that it is important that lasoro70 and the Korean teachers in (23), MILF Mommy and Mayay in (10), Bbarton713 and PozzSka in (15), and the IAU and schoolchildren in (23) agree upon common application conditions for ‘cold’, ‘fat’, ‘martini’, and ‘planet’. Perhaps lasoro70 and the teachers will need to arrange a school picnic, and their discussions would be facilitated by reaching agreement about when it is, and is not, too “cold” to do so (cf. the discussion of Plunkett and Sundell’s ‘cold’ example below). Perhaps Bbarton713 and PozzSka will need to compile a list of cocktail recipes in the forum, and thus need to agree upon what should be labeled ‘martini’. And the astronomers’ decision about how to apply ‘planet’ is likely to have ramifications for school texts and museum exhibits viewed by the third graders—and it is important that the students not be confused by conflicting uses of this word. What the approach denies, however, is that the syntactic forms employed in (23), (10), (15), and (23) are appropriate for these enterprises.

According to the dismissive approach, these exchanges misleadingly represent the debates as concerning whether 65° F *is cold*, a size 12 *is fat*, a certain cocktail *is a*

⁶⁹ See also Hirsch (2005, esp. p. 70) and Sidelle (2007).

martini, and so forth. In the words of Sidelle, “there are genuine disputes that are more or less hidden, or at least misrepresented as being about the surface subject matter. And we would do well to pursue these latter disputes in their own terms” (2007, p. 86), and “what dispute there is concerns something *other than it seems*, and ought to be discussed *as such*” (p. 97; emphasis in original). The disputants should, then, reframe their arguments to make clear what is really at issue—that is, the conditions under which certain predicates should be applied. (Indeed, since the participants have not, as a matter of fact, reached agreement on the metalinguistic issues of whether ‘cold’ applies to 65° F, ‘fat’ applies to size 12, ‘martini’ applies to said cocktail, and so on, there are no determinate propositions for the speakers to dispute using the sentences that they do; without coming to terms on their terms, as it were, they cannot have genuine disagreement about the purported subjects of dispute.)

Like other proponents of the dismissive approach, Sidelle does not deny that the disputes that *underlie* merely verbal disputes can be substantive and even quite important—but he denies that the surface syntax actually employed in merely verbal is appropriate for the task of debating these underlying controversies. The former is a point of agreement between the dismissive approach and the negotiation view; the latter is the main point of tension.

2. The Negotiation View

A recently popular proposal holds that such disputes provide occasion for speakers to “negotiate” the meaning of their words. In contrast to the dismissive approach, the

negotiation view accepts that the terms in which speakers actually conduct merely verbal disputes are appropriate for the task of coordinating shared standards for applying the predicate in use; the syntactic shape of the dispute does *not* obscure its nature.⁷⁰

Consider the schema shared by our motivating examples (the “objective frame” if you like): speakers A and B use ‘F’ according to different conditions of application—exactly one of which apply to *a* (say, A’s)—and B denies A’s utterance of ‘*a* is F’. The negotiation view holds that B’s denial of A’s utterance (e.g. ‘No, *a* is not F’) can be an effective tool in negotiating a common meaning of ‘F’. Coordination of meaning can occur while A and B each *use* ‘F’ in making classifications; there is no need for B to ascend to an explicitly metalinguistic linguistic level in order to object to A’s using ‘F’ according to standards that are obtained by *a*, or to promote alternative standards for applying ‘F’.

Note that this central thesis of the negotiation view has the form of a conditional: *if* A and B’s dispute aims toward the coordination of a common meaning of ‘F’, *then* B’s denial of A’s ascription of ‘F’ to *a* is felicitous. As previously mentioned, advocates of the dismissive approach can allow that it is important for A and B to come to agreement on shared standards for applying ‘F’ and that such metalinguistic disputes often lie beneath merely verbal ones; thus, the antecedent of this conditional may be common ground between the dismissive approach and the negotiation view. But the dismissive approach rejects the conditional. Contrarily, I am happy to grant the conditional claim

⁷⁰ See Richard (2008), Ludlow (2008, 2014), Plunkett and Sundell (2013a, b), and Barker (2013) for variations on the basic idea discussed in this section.

that *if* A and B's dispute aims toward the coordination of a common meaning of 'F' *then* B's denial of A's ascription of 'F' to *a* is felicitous—but I wish to cast doubt upon the applicability of its antecedent to many core cases. It appears that many, perhaps most, stereotypical merely verbal disputes are not appropriately construed as word-meaning negotiation. Before making that argument, however, it is useful to clarify what it might mean for a dispute to be an instance of word-meaning negotiation.

There are multiple ways in which to develop the core thesis of the negotiation view that the function of stereotypical merely verbal disputes is to promote the coordination of shared standards for applying a predicate. Two choice points merit attention. The first concerns whether or not it is a *conscious objective* of the disputants to coordinate a common standard for applying the predicate in use. Do MILF Mommy and Mayay, for example, think of (10) as a scenario in which they are attempting to negotiate a standard of fatness upon which both parties can agree? Do PozzSka and Jmallen5 conceptualize (15) as an activity in which they try to reach a consensus as to how 'martini' should be used? Note that an affirmative answer, although possible, is not essential to the negotiation view. Indeed, some proponents—including, perhaps most notably, Ludlow (2014)—maintain that coordination of meaning is primarily an automatic and unreflective process (cf. pp. 25ff). And, at a broader societal level, the proponent of the negotiation view might conceptualize such disputes as pieces in a grander process of lexical evolution—even if the disputants themselves are unaware of the role that such scuffles can play in shaping the collective lexicon. Thus, the negotiation view can permit commonplace merely verbal disputes to count as instances of negotiation

of word meaning even if their participants do not think of their own activities in this way.

The second choice-point—which I take to be orthogonal to the first—concerns the scope of the coordination at which the disputes aim. One possibility is that the disputants negotiate the meaning of a predicate ‘F’ merely for the purposes of their present conversation—with no lasting ramifications. This seems to be the picture in David Lewis’s influential “scorekeeping” account of conversation, a major source of inspiration for some versions of the negotiation view (e.g. Richard 2008). Lewis (1979) holds that sentences like ‘France is hexagonal’ lack a determinate truth-value outside of a conversational context; however, depending upon the standards of precision that are adopted within a given context, ‘France is hexagonal’ could be either true or false. Moreover, the standards of precision are not always fixed in advance of a conversation; indeed, accepting or rejecting an utterance ‘France is hexagonal’ is a way by which interlocutors can shift or precisify what standards of precision *are* operative in their context. In effect, then, accepting the sentence *as true* is a way to *make that sentence true* in the context. Richard (2008) applies Lewis’s basic insight to disputes that concern the threshold for applying a vague predicate (‘rich’ in his example):

The extension of ‘rich’ varies across contexts as a result of how individuals within the context use the expression. It is subject to what David Lewis has called *accommodation*—roughly put, its extension shifts to make sentences in which it is used true, provided no one objects to the use in question. Correlatively, ‘rich’ is subject to ‘contextual negotiation’: when speakers differ over how it is to be applied to cases, they can and often do attempt to reach a consensus as to how it is to be applied, via examples, argument, mutually agreeable stipulation, and so on (pp. 99-100).

Richard’s idea is that—like standards of precision for hexagonality—the thresholds for applying vague predicates can differ between conversational contexts. Additionally, and

importantly for understanding *disputes*, interlocutors might disagree about what threshold they should adopt in their own context of conversation. Two speakers might attempt to get their interlocutors to accommodate different, incompatible adjustments of the contextually operative standard of application—and this, according to Richard, could be the source of such allegedly “merely verbal” disputes. Possibly, for example, MILF Mommy asserts “Size 12, you’re fat!” in the hope that her sentence will be accepted and that, thereby, the contextually operative threshold for applying ‘fat’ will shift downwards so that women of size 12 (and larger) will count as “fat” in the conversational context. Mayay, however, blocks accommodation of MILF Mommy’s assertion and the concomitant adjustment in standards of precision—and places an opposing bid that the threshold will be *raised* so that size 12 will count as “not fat” in the context.

As Richard describes such cases, even if disputants manage to settle upon a precisification of ‘rich’ or ‘fat’ or the like, this will not necessarily hold lasting ramifications with respect to the use of the predicate in other conversational contexts. But this limitation is not essential to the negotiation view. On the contrary, the view can allow that some (if not all) merely verbal disputes aim to produce long-term coordination of meaning—agreement on the application of a key term that persists beyond the bounds of the conversation in which the dispute occurs. Indeed, although it is not often noted, even Lewis’s original “scorekeeping” account seems to demand the flexibility to permit long-lasting accommodation. Although most of Lewis’s examples involve *intra*-conversational adjustments, he proposes that performatives like christenings and marriage pronouncements work in the same way (p. 356)—and, presumably, ships retain their

names and couples remained married beyond the conversational context in which the relevant performative utterance takes place. Other paradigms of attempts at long-term word-meaning negotiation might include legal disputes (e.g., perhaps, a debate in the courts over whether ‘free’ should apply to a slave who takes up residence in free territory) or the debate *between astronomers* over whether to apply ‘planet’ to Pluto.

It might be, of course, that some instances of word-meaning negotiation are narrower in their ambitions and ramifications, and some are broader. Ludlow, for example, writes:

When courts come to a decision on a particular dispute they set a precedent that may carry over into other jurisdictions. On the other hand it may not. Similarly, we may resolve a dispute or coordinate on the meaning of a term, and expect that to carry over into other microlanguages that we form. We may be disappointed to find we have to reargue our point of view, or re-establish our credentials (2014, p. 79).

Indeed, Richard continues from the previously quoted passage to conjecture that “accommodation and negotiation” can also occur at a broader macro-level scale “via something like a process of cultural accommodation and negotiation—different uses of a notion are disputed, speakers argue, make discoveries, people contract or correct some parts of how the notions get applied, plain old happy happenstance extends and entrenches a novel way of applying the notion” (p. 116).

All combinations of decisions at the two choice points yield possible descriptions of conversational exchanges oriented toward “negotiation” of word meaning. Speakers might consciously aim to coordinate common standards for applying a predicate either for the purposes of their conversation or for longer-term use. On the other hand, automatic and unconscious processes of negotiation might cause interlocutors to

coordinate the meanings of their words during their present conversation—or such processes might guide a slower but longer-lived evolution of the lexicon across *many* conversations. In the latter case, even if the interlocutors in a particular dispute do not succeed in converging on common standards for the predicate in use—and, indeed, even if they don't try—a merely verbal dispute might still be considered reasonable due to the fact that exchanges of its general type are critical contributors to the evolution of the collective lexicon. The advocate of the negotiation view, therefore, might hold that the practice of verbal disputes is a reasonable practice for a community of speakers to preserve—even if certain instances thereof seem silly or trivial. As Ludlow states:

[I]t may be that some of the disputes...are valuable precisely because they are litigating the content of certain key terms and this may be valuable in contexts where more is at stake and communication is critical. In other words, idle talk may well serve the function of helping us to calibrate our lexicons during periods of down time. These periods of calibration may serve us well later when we need to collaborate on some important project or problem (2014, p. 79).

3. The Descriptive Inadequacy of the Negotiation View

In this section, I argue that many stereotypical merely verbal disputes are *not* appropriately described as activities in which speakers coordinate common standards for using a certain predicate. Thus, although the negotiation view promises to rationalize the behavior of speakers in merely verbal disputes, it rests on an assumption about the functions of these disputes that appears to be *false* in many core cases. When this assumption is removed, the negotiation view is left without an explanation of these speakers' verbal behavior.

I first reanalyze several case studies of specific disputes that have been alleged to

be instances of the negotiation of meaning, arguing that this description of the speakers' goals and behavior appears inaccurate (§3.1). Next, keeping in mind the variants of the negotiation view laid out in §2, I adopt a broader macro-level perspective. I contend that it is additionally unreasonable to posit that the social function of many stereotypical merely verbal disputes is to promote coordination of a common lexicon; indeed, I venture that convergence in meaning is *antithetical* to the plausible social roles of some such disputes (§3.2). This reanalysis of the functions of merely verbal disputes lays the groundwork for the positive account in the next section.

3.1 Negotiation Reanalyzed

Leading proponents of the negotiation view, such as Plunkett and Sundell and Ludlow, are primarily interested in disputes that arise in more serious and formal settings (e.g. legal disputes). They seem to take for granted, however, that the same analyses apply to everyday, informal disputes like our motivating examples. Ludlow, for example, says that they “key difference is that rather than taking place in a formal courtroom setting, these debates play out in less formal realms, ranging from sports talk radio to arguments with colleagues, friends, and partners” (2014, p. 78).

It is illustrative, I believe, to reassess several cases have been presented as scenarios in which interlocutors attempt to work out common standards for applying a predicate: disputes about the weather like (23), disputes about “fatness” like (10), and disputes over the application of labels of psychopathologies (as suggested in passing by Richard 2008). I believe that, insofar as the negotiation thesis *does* appear reasonable in

these cases, this appearance at best depends on details and assumption about the examples that do not obtain in all (or even most) real-world instances of similar disputes.

Case 1: Disputing Temperature.

Plunkett and Sundell describe a fictional dispute in which two officemates agree as to what the air temperature *is*, but disagree about whether this temperature counts as “cold”:

Suppose that Oscar and Jill are...officemates in Chicago. Oscar is, to use a colloquial phrase, a “freezy cat”—he often feels chilly. Jill is not. While they look together at their shared, known-to-be-accurate thermostat, Oscar utters [“It’s cold in here”] and Jill utters [“No, it’s not cold in here”] (2013a, p. 261).

The authors hold that Oscar and Jill attempt to negotiate a common cutoff point for applying ‘cold’. To substantiate this claim, they comment on why these officemates would benefit from doing so:

[T]he word “cold” plays a crucial functional role in our discourse and coordinated decision making with respect to climate control. In particular, an agreement amongst all parties who share an indoor space that the space can accurately be described as “cold” leads swiftly to action—more specifically, to thermostat-turning-up action. Thresholds matter. Why should Jill have to turn up the heat if the office cannot even be described as “cold”? (pp. 261-262)

According to Plunkett and Sundell, then, a decision with respect to how to apply ‘cold’ holds consequences for joint actions of Oscar and Jill: the two speakers need to reach an agreement on the setting of the thermostat—and neither is willing to turn up the thermostat when the air temperature does not qualify as “cold.” Given these assumptions about Oscar and Jill’s interests—and about the practical ramifications of agreement upon standards for applying ‘cold’—it seems plausible to understand their dispute as an instance of negotiation the standards for applying a predicate.

But I think that we should raise worries about the application of this analysis to numerous other everyday disputes about the “coldness” or “hotness” or the air temperature. First, although it will not be the focus of my criticism, we might question whether decisions with respect to thermostat settings *are* significantly impacted by the difference in the standards with which the operators of the thermostat use ‘cold’. It seems, in my experience, that this linguistic issue has little bearing on the practical one: some people are simply forced to relent to feeling uncomfortably warm or cold. In other words, compromise in action certainly does not *require* compromise in language—and it is not clear how much the latter even facilitates the former. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Plunkett and Sundell’s precise analysis—which invokes the fact that Oscar and Jill jointly decide how to set the thermostat—cannot apply to many other merely verbal disputes about temperature that commonly arise among speakers.

In (23), for example, the tension between lasoro70 and the Korean teachers does not concern the *classroom* temperature but the *outdoor* temperature—and the reader has no doubt overheard many similar disputes. Clearly, unlike Oscar and Jill with their office thermostat, lasoro70 and the Korean teachers do not exercise control over how to set the weather. At this point, I presume, the proponent of the negotiation view might reply that there are *other* reasons for which it could be important for speakers to reach agreement concerning what temperatures are “cold” or “hot.” It might be, for example, that lasoro70 and the Korean teachers need to determine what outdoor temperatures count as “cold” for the purpose of planning when to hold a school picnic—or perhaps reaching agreement on the “coldness” of outdoor temperatures can itself facilitate *future* thermostat-setting

decisions. Indeed, the advocate of the negotiation view might even argue that all temperature disputes, whether they occur inside or outside, serve the general function of coordinating joint standards for applying predicates like ‘hot’ and ‘cold’. This outcome might be thought to be useful in the long term—in case the interlocutors *do* find themselves confronted with the need to jointly decide how to set a thermostat, or schedule outdoor activities, or so on—even if not in the context of conversation.

The above tactic, however, seems to ignore the fact that disputes about “coldness” often occur between speakers who lack *any* need to jointly plan for some temperature-influenced activity. Indeed, strangers who meet at a bus stop or a checkout queue might pass the time by discussing the weather (as talk about the weather, after all, has become enshrined as a paradigmatic example of small talk)—and this practice sometimes leads to brief arguments on the lines of (23). Such strangers, however, are unlikely even to meet again—much less to “collaborate on some important project or problem” in which they need to make temperature-related decisions. These considerations, I believe, should cast doubt on the claim that there is even downstream practical benefit for participants in merely verbal disputes to converge on standards for applying words like ‘cold’ or ‘hot’. But if there is no practical benefit in achieving the aim of negotiation, it becomes suspect to view disputes like (23) as situations in which speakers are negotiating common standards for applying their predicates. At the least, it becomes more strained to suppose that it is reasonable for speakers to engage in such alleged acts of word-meaning negotiation.

Perhaps the proponent of the negotiation view could maintain that it is

advantageous for speakers to be promiscuous in their attempts to negotiate word meaning; after all, speakers can never be *certain* who their eventual collaborators will be. Indeed, it might be hard to falsify such a view—except perhaps that, as I will defend in §3.2, there is evidence that coordination of common meaning is *not* always desirable for speakers or society. First, though, let's reassess two more case studies.

Case 2: Disputing “Fatness”

Sidelle describes a scenario in which a wife says to her husband that she is “fat” (“Look at me, I’m fat!”) and that, thus, she is “going to start going on a diet” (2007, p. 100).

Although Sidelle’s position aligns much more closely to the dismissive approach than the negotiation view, he agrees with Plunkett and Sundell that decisions on the application of certain term (e.g. ‘fat’ and ‘bald’) are significant due to their practical consequences:

[I]n at least these cases, and many others, the dispute is heated and will not go away because which claim is right is deemed to have important practical consequences. If you are bald, and have certain other attitudes, perhaps you should wear a hat, or get implants, or feel a certain way about yourself, or revise your attitudes toward certain other people; similarly, if you are fat, perhaps you should go on a diet, etc. ... (p. 101).

Now, to be sure, some disputes about “fatness” (or “baldness”) might reasonably be construed as acts of negotiation. MILF Mommy, Mayay, and other participants in the discussion surrounding (10), for instance, might be thought to be attempting to coordinate common standards for applying ‘fat’ in part to decide what attitudes it is appropriate to hold towards individuals of a certain size.

I believe, however, that it would be myopic to apply the negotiation view to all disputes about whether a person is “fat” (or “bald” or so on). In fact, it might be

particularly questionable in situations like those invoked by Sidelle: conversations between intimates. As such exchanges typically play out, there might be no genuine room for “negotiation”; instead, the course of argument seems ritualistic and constrained. When a wife describes herself as “fat” before her husband, she is likely to do so to express discontent or lack of confidence in her appearance—and, importantly, to *seek reassurance* that her husband still finds her attractive. She does *not* attempt to persuade him that, indeed, ‘fat’ ought to be used in a way such that it applies to her; she would presumably be quite disheartened if he accepted her assertion (e.g. “That’s right; you’re fat”). Correspondingly, in the husband’s turn at talk, it would generally be expected that he *reject* his wife’s self-disparaging remark—and, as she no doubt wishes, reassure her that he finds her attractive.⁷¹ Indeed, it seems to be the husband’s social obligation to *continue* to insist that she is not fat—even if she persists in saying otherwise (which might happen if she has been feeling insecure and in need of venting these feelings). There is no genuine negotiation here: the wife might continue to describe herself as “fat” until she has satisfied the venting of her insecurities, and the husband will presumably continue to deny that she is “fat” as a gesture to boost her self-esteem. When each party has fulfilled these needs, the argument presumably will cease with neither party having adopted the other’s expressed stance on the wife’s “fatness.”

⁷¹ This is an example of what Pomerantz (1984) calls a “disagreement-preferred” setting: although agreement is typically preferred in casual conversations (excepting cases of ritualized, recreational, or “mock” argumentation), this does not seem to be the case when the initial speaker asserts something that is self-deprecating. The polite reply is to counter with a more positive assessment of that speaker.

Case 3: Disputing Psychopathology.

Finally, consider some of the terms that Richard presents as plausible candidates for negotiation:

Take a term...whose application *matters*—‘obese’, ‘anorexic’, ‘obsessive compulsive’, ‘paranoid’, ‘sadistic’, ‘narcissistic’ are examples of the sort of words I have in mind. Imagine a dispute between A and B about how to shape the boundaries of the concept—to make it vivid, imagine that the concept at issue is the concept of narcissism, and (no offense) which way the dispute goes makes a difference to you, as if A prevails you won’t be classified narcissistic, but if B does you will (2008, p. 118).

Again, it seems probable that some arguments can be aptly described as “shaping the boundaries” of concepts like narcissism, anorexia, obsessive compulsive disorder, and so on; think, for example, of debates that take place between authors of the DSM or other guidelines for the diagnosis of mental disorders. I believe, however, that the case for word-meaning negotiation is more difficult in casual, day-to-day disputes over the application of such terms.

Ordinary speakers sometimes use the above words with deference to psychiatrists or other medical professionals; sometimes, however, they do not—as when wielding them in teasing or insults. I submit that, in the case in which speakers use the word deferentially, most disputes that arise by ordinary speakers would not be “merely verbal” in the sense that we have described—for, in principle, these disputes could be resolved by informing the disputants of the definitions employed by the professionals (as well as the relevant personal details of the individual whose mental health is under discussion). (And, if the professionals themselves cannot decide upon a particular case, the deferential

speakers might drop the dispute.) Meanwhile, in the latter case—in which speakers use terms like ‘narcissistic’, ‘obsessive compulsive’, and ‘paranoid’ *without* deference to psychiatrists or psychologists (etc.)—paradigmatic disputes over the application of these terms are probably *not* best understood as negotiation. Note that informal applications of these labels often seem to be hyperbolic; speakers might apply them teasingly (or insultingly) to friends and colleagues whom the speaker recognizes to be pretty much normal and not in genuine need of psychiatric help. (Indeed, if the speaker and addressees believed that the ascriber might need medical or psychological help for the stated condition, then such a tease would ordinarily seem tactless.) They might, for example, jokingly apply ‘sadistic’ to a colleague who admits to having enjoyed burning ants with a magnifying glass as child—or ‘narcissistic’ to a friend who enjoys decorating with mirrors. And a speaker might also turn the mockery on herself—as when, say, she quips “I am so OCD!” after expressing a worry about whether she left garage door open. Of course, such words can also be used more maliciously to express scorn of another’s behavior.

In scenarios like these—as in the Sidelle-derived ‘fat’ example discussed above—a speaker might deny the ascription as a way to soften or deflect the tease or insult: the initial speaker voices a negative evaluation of the subject of the ascription, and the respondent counters this negative evaluation. For instance, when A says “I am so OC,” B might reply “No, you’re not; we all worry about leaving the garage door open sometimes.” Or when A says “Mary is such a narcissist,” B might reply “Oh, no, she’s not really; that’s all just an act.” In these cases, B’s denial of A’s claim does not seem to

manifest an attempt to negotiate word meaning—since A’s initial utterance is not a sincere attempt to loosen the standards for applying ‘obsessive compulsive’, ‘narcissistic’, or so forth. Instead, as suggested above, the ascription of these predicates seems to be mere exaggeration—for the purpose of expressing a negative evaluation of the mental condition of some individual (perhaps largely in jest). (Indeed, the speakers in such exchanges might express deference to the medical community in the sense that they would concede that the individuals in question are not “really” obsessive compulsive, narcissistic, or so on.)

In some cases, moreover, negotiation might fail to be reasonable goal simply due to power differentials. The second speaker in a merely verbal dispute might not occupy a position from which he can exert any effect on the established meaning of the predicate in question—nor does he necessarily speak under the illusion that he can exert such effect. This could be the case in Richard’s example, for instance, if a lay speaker were to object to the definition of ‘narcissism’ by the authors of the DSM-IV (on the basis, say, that it classifies him as a narcissist). Indeed, I believe that the same point applies to the speech acts of third-graders in (17) and perhaps Doug in (14). Let’s grant that is quite plausible that astronomers engaged in word-meaning negotiation when deliberating about whether or not to redefine ‘planet’ in a way that excludes Pluto—or that the commentators who compiled the list of “100 Best Athletes” engaged in a word-meaning dispute *en route* to deciding to permit the inclusion of Secretariat, a non-human, on the list. Nevertheless, these decisions have been made by the time the speakers in (17) and (14) voice their objections—and the latter speakers appear powerless to override them.

Yet this does not seem to make it irrational for these speakers to voice their objections.

3.2 Social Benefits to *Non*-Negotiation

Let's now revisit the concern raised at the end of the reassessment of Plunkett and Sundell's 'cold' example: perhaps the proponent of the negotiation view could claim that it is beneficial for a community of speakers to develop and sustain a practice of participation in merely verbal disputes, even if this leads to the occurrences of particular exchanges that do not seem to have negotiation as their aim. Perhaps, that is, we have been misled to focus on features of individual interactions—such as the apparent goals and desires of the conversational participants—when we should not *expect* always to see evidence of the benefits of negotiation at this level. Instead, the general practice of speakers' periodic engagement in merely verbal disputes might be justified on the basis of the potential long-term benefit of coordinating a common lexicon within a community of speakers—and specific merely verbal disputes might be justifiable only in virtue of being part of this general practice. (By analogy, perhaps, having the ability to bear children is not useful to those individual women who lack the means or desire to raise children—but it is obvious that, in general, it is beneficial to the species that women have the ability to bear children.)

The claim that I will now make, however, is that it is *not* generally beneficial to society that speakers coordinate common standards for applying the predicates used in merely verbal disputes. In fact, I believe, it is often more beneficial that speakers *not* coordinate meaning. Often, the rift in application conditions that underlies the dispute has

become entrenched for good reason: it is more beneficial for speakers to cultivate refinements in conditions for applying the predicate that are specific to their sub-communities. Moreover, in some cases, this rift reflects differences by which individuals and groups *distinguish* one another; thus, insofar as merely verbal disputes serve as expressions of such distinctions, their purpose would be impeded—or rendered wholly ineffective—by the negotiation of a common meaning.

Let's begin with the first point. The differences in meaning that underlie merely verbal disputes are typically deeply entrenched in linguistic practice. Moreover, in many cases, it appears that this difference has persisted because it is benign or even beneficial; there is simply no need for all speakers in the community to agree upon common standards for applying the predicate. Consider again (23). Often, when speakers use terms like 'cold' or 'hot', what they want to relate is how their surroundings feel *to them*. The same could be said of numerous other "subjective" predicates for which merely verbal disputes can arise (e.g. 'sweet', 'spicy', 'bitter', 'loud', and 'filling')—as in the following exchanges (which are transcribed roughly as overheard in real-life conversations):

- (25) Felicia [eating a piece of dark chocolate]:
Ew! That's bitter! It tastes like baking chocolate.

Denise [sampling the same chocolate]:
That's not bitter. ... I like rich chocolate.

- (26) Russ:
Mark Pi must think people have small stomachs; the lunch portions aren't at all filling.

Rodney:
Not filling? No way! The portions are huge. We have to share them.

In exchanges like (23), (25), and (26), it seems that the respective speakers want to report

their own feelings and sensations. Thus, it appears to suit their needs and interests to apply ‘cold’, ‘bitter’, and ‘filling’ according to their own responses (i.e. as opposed to adopting intersubjective standards of application)—and such responses, of course, can be expected to vary between speakers. Thus, it seems, the divergence in application conditions that underlies disputes like (23), (25), and (26) is one that it is beneficial to *preserve*.

The general point—that it is benign, even beneficial, for a linguistic community to permit a multiplicity of standards for applying certain predicates—extends far beyond predicates that denote response-dependent properties. Return to stereotypical disputes about the classification of food or drink—such as (3), our example of the venerated “martini” dispute, or (27) and (28) below.

- (27) Thomas’ Executive:
These are New York Style Bagels.

Arthur Schwartz:
[Thomas’ “New York Style Bagels”] are not bagels at all, but Pepperidge Farm white bread in bagel drag. I mean, they have holes. That’s the only relation they have to bagels at all.⁷²

- (28) Korean:
Hamburgers on the hibachi is barbecue.

North Carolinian:
No way. That’s not barbecue.⁷³

I assume that there is seldom pressure for all sub-communities within a broader linguistic

⁷² Arthur Schwartz. “Bagels.” The Food Maven’s Diary.
<<http://www.thefoodmaven.com/diary/00000194.html>>.

⁷³ This website, for one, suggests that this sort of dispute is commonly instigated by BBQ snobs: “Barbecue Defined” (May 11, 2012) AmazingRibs.com
<http://www.amazingribs.com/BBQ_articles/barbecue_defined.html>.

community to converge shared criteria for words like ‘martini’, ‘bagel’, or ‘barbeque’. Social groups might cluster around common interests in certain types of food or drink—although this might not be as common as the formation of music-based subcultures (as mentioned below)—and, even if common culinary interest is not the *basis* for the formation of a social group, speakers within the same geographic region, socio-economic class, or so forth naturally become familiar with the same types of food and drink. And, of course, the prevalent types and preparations of food and drink—as well as the labels thereof—might naturally *differ* between geographic, socio-economic, or ethnic groups. Regional variation in what preparations of meat are termed ‘barbeque’, as reflected in (28), is one example thereof.

Even if there is *internal* pressure on members of a sub-community to coordinate common application conditions for the labels of culinary categories, it seems that there should be much less, if any, pressure for distinct groups to converge on common application conditions. Most cooking and conversation occurs *within* certain sub-communities—and outsiders learn to anticipate that cuisines, and their labels, vary across geographical and social boundaries. For example, the geographically-based divergence in application conditions for words like ‘barbeque’ does not obviously pose impediments when members of different communities interact—and it likely facilitates more precise communication when speakers associate with others within their community. Similarly, “purists” of various stripes are unlikely to be confused or hampered in their food and drink consumption due to clashing classificatory schemes. Although cocktail purists, for example, are likely to happen across bars that serve dozens of kinds of “martinis”—and

bagel purists are likely to pass through a supermarket's bread aisle—these individuals can easily enough roll their eyes at these supposed transgressions before requesting a traditional gin martini or making a stop at a local bakery. Furthermore, those speakers who do partake of products like Thomas's "bagels" and chocolate espresso "martinis" are probably not deeply interested in the crafts of bagel-making or mixology—and, thus, they are not likely to be individuals who would engage in extended conversation with purists about these domains of foods and drinks. Similar comments can be made with respect to purists about certain music genres—like DV8RZ in (24). Indeed, as I discuss further below, it seems more advantageous that members of music-based subcultures *preserve the distinction* between their stricter application conditions for the label of their preferred genre and the looser application conditions adopted by the "mainstream."

In summary, then, the proliferations of standards of application that underlie merely verbal disputes are often *benign* insofar as communication is not impeded by the lack of common standards. Meanwhile, much communication is likely to be *facilitated* when different sub-groups adopt different precisifications of terms as suited for their interests. These conclusions, I submit, threaten the thesis—presented as a possible rejoinder to the concerns of §2.1—that participation in merely verbal disputes is a valuable practice *in general* due to the overall social benefit of lexical coordination (irrespective of the short-term objectives of participants in particular disputes). For it seems that, often, what most benefits a community of speakers is not convergence but *divergence* in standards of application between sub-communities or even individuals.

I wish to go farther, however. I submit that—in addition to permitting greater

precision when speakers converse with others within their social group—divergence in standards of application serves the socially important function of *marking group boundaries*. Some (perhaps many) merely verbal disputes highlight differences between individuals or the social groups to which they belong. As I discuss in more depth in §4, classificatory judgements can reflect a speaker’s values, interests, regional heritage, identification with certain subcultures, and other personal attributes—and it might not be desirable for speakers or society to eliminate these underlying differences. Speakers might identify as a member of a certain cultural heritage or subculture, or even as a person with certain idiosyncratic traits—and these facets of their identity can be reflected in the criteria by which they apply their words.

Music genre disputes like (24) provide good examples. The proponent of the negotiation view might assume that industrial music purists, such as DV8RZ, wish to “reform” a corrupt or benighted mainstream—exemplified by speakers who, like Destro700, believe that the relatively commercially successful, radio-friendly, and club-friendly band Nine Inch Nails represents the sound of industrial music. And they might say likewise about “kvlt” black metal purists who reject the application of ‘black metal’ to Dimmu Borgir, progressive rock aficionados who reject the application of ‘prog’ to Styx, and fans of traditional country music who reject the application of ‘country’ to Taylor Swift—and so on. But this would ignore the crucial point that subcultures *define themselves by reference to an out-group*. In the case of “rivetheads” and other music-centric subcultures, the corrupt and benighted mainstream provides such an out-group. The existence of this shared enemy—composed of those who fail to understand or

appreciate the subculture's preferred genre of music—is beneficial for the purpose of generating in-group solidarity.

As Thornton (1995) discusses with reference to the underground rave scene in London, members of music-focused subcultures differentiate themselves from non-members in large part through their appreciation of purity or “authenticity” in their genre of interest—a value that is reflected directly in the conditions under which they are willing to ascribe the genre's *label*. Correspondingly, I submit, when a purist like DV8RZ instigates a dispute about genre-labeling, he might do so primarily as a means to signal his *difference* from the initial speaker (and the mainstream culture that the initial speaker represents). Although such purists and traditionalists *are* likely to consider their own standards to be superior to the mainstream, it is doubtful that they wish the mainstream to be eradicated—or that, regardless of their own desires, it would be beneficial to their subculture to lose its distinction from the mainstream. (Of course, standards of application might track other distinctions as well; for example, since the sound and boundaries of musical genres tend to shift over time, dedication to certain standards of application can also tag a speaker as a member of a certain *generation*.)

This diagnosis seems to apply to other common merely verbal disputes as well—including disputes of culinary classification like (15), (27), and (28). When a cocktail purist like PozzSka rejects a liberal use of ‘martini’ like Bbarton713's, she might wish to reform others' uses of cocktail vocabulary—but, perhaps, the primary function of her response is to signal her own identity as a cocktail purist. Like traditionalists about various music genres, cocktail purists can bond by bewailing the degradation in the

public's appreciation for mixed drinks. The adoption of different standards for applying terms like 'martini' helps to sustain the purists' identities as distinct from the mainstream; coordination of common standards would eliminate it. Indeed, I would guess that when non-scientists banded together in Facebook groups with names like "Sorry, NASA. Pluto is a planet," their objective was not to reverse the IAU's decision but *merely* to unite in opposition to a common enemy—viz. scientists who fail to pay due respect to cultural heritage.

In fact, I presume that even disputes about "hot" or "cold" air temperatures can serve a difference-marking function. Returning to the Plunkett and Sundell example discussed in §3.1, it is easy to imagine that Jill finds it less important that Oscar's decisions with respect to the application of 'cold' might have practical implications downstream (e.g. influence on thermostat settings) than that Oscar's present use of 'cold' is a *result* of certain facts about Oscar's *prior* engagement with the world. Jill is likely to judge that Oscar is not well-adjusted to cooler temperatures. She might consider this to be a mark of, say, wussiness or lack of virility—and, in replying "It's not cold," she might implicitly criticize him for *that*, while also displaying her relative heartiness. Likewise, lasoro70's objection to the Korean teachers' use of 'cold' in (23) might signal not only that he is comparatively robust but also that he is *non-Korean*.

In the above cases, to reiterate, if common standards of application were adopted by all parties, the merely verbal disputes would lose their apparent function as symbolic markers of individual and group *differences*. This function of merely verbal disputes seems in tension with the core thesis of the negotiation view. At the least, the negotiation

view seems to lack resources to explain how and why speakers engage in such activities. On my view, however, speakers in stereotypical merely verbal disputes implicitly evaluate one another's classificatory schemes—or simply one another. Moreover, following the model of Chapter 2, we can explain the speech act of the respondent in a merely verbal dispute—the use of denial—as itself an evaluative act. As we will see in the remainder of this chapter, my positive proposal can explain the goals and functions of merely verbal disputes described above.

4. Targets of Evaluation

In §3, argued that it is infeasible to describe all commonplace merely verbal disputes in terms of the negotiation view: in many cases, coordination of meaning seems not only unlikely to occur, but also unlikely to promote the interests of the disputants (or their wider linguistic community) if it did. In the remainder of this chapter, I advance a counterproposal that promises to accommodate cases like those just shown to be problematic to the negotiation view—while providing a framework for explaining the rhetorical strategies used in both cases in which the latter view is and is not apt. On my view, extrapolating my position on objectively-framed disputes about taste, the respondent in a merely verbal dispute employs what we might consider a “feigned contradiction.” Framing the initial speaker as *factually incorrect*—rather than merely using her words differently—lends force to what is, in effect, an expression of evaluation.

I begin by clarifying what the respondent in a merely verbal dispute might express an evaluation *of*. I describe several ways by which the utterance of any old classificatory

judgement (from “Size 12, you’re fat” to “Pluto is not a planet” to “This is not dubstep; it’s industrial”) sets up a potential target of evaluation by other speakers—and, indeed, can do so even in cases in which the speaker herself does not intend to express an evaluation. Specifically, I claim, when A applies ‘F’ to *a*, A might set up one or more of the following targets for counter-evaluation: *a* itself (§4.1), “Fs” or “F-ness” (§4.2), and—perhaps most importantly—A’s criteria for applying ‘F’ or even *A herself* in virtue of those criteria (§4.3). Correspondingly, then, B’s reply “*a* is not F” can serve as an implicit counter-evaluation of any of these targets. In brief, I propose that A’s utterance establishes a target for evaluation, and B’s utterance—although *framed* as a rejection of the propositional content of A’s utterance—primarily serves to express a evaluation of this target.

4.1 The Subject of Predication

Consider a merely verbal dispute in which one speaker applies ‘F’ to *a* and another does not. One possible source of tension—which is present in some, although not all, such disputes—is that the disputants reveal conflicting evaluative attitudes towards *a*. This can be true even if ‘F’ is not a predicate that seems intuitively “evaluative” (e.g. ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘beautiful’, ‘delicious’, ‘disgusting’).

Indeed, I believe that this is true of many of our motivating examples. Whether or not ‘cold’, ‘fat’, ‘athlete’, and ‘industrial’ have an evaluative semantic component (an issue that I will not presently address), they can be used to express evaluations of the subjects of predication. Take, for instance, (23) and (10): to call the temperature “cold” is

typically to issue a negative evaluation of the air temperature (since the physical sensations associated with coldness are unpleasant), and to call someone “fat” is typically to express a negative evaluation of her appearance—given that extra weight is typically considered to detract from an individual’s attractiveness. In these cases, it is likely that the initial speaker—not only the respondent—intends to express an evaluation: the Korean teachers presumably intend to *complain* about the weather, and MILF Mommy no doubt means to convey that size-12 women are *unattractive* in virtue of their size (and, as evident in the remainder of her blog post, condemnable for sloth and intemperance). In voicing these judgements, the speakers open the ground for criticism from those who do not share their negative assessments of 65° weather and size-12 women. In these cases, therefore, the subjects of discussion—the weather and the size-12 women—are possible targets for evaluation.

Similar observations can be raised with respect to some of our other motivating examples. Consider (14). To call a person—or a horse—an “athlete” is often to express praise, admiration, or respect for said individual.⁷⁴ Doug and Gary G, it seems, differ in their opinions as to whether Secretariat merits such praise: Doug seems to think that applying ‘athlete’ to Secretariat would be to overvalue a horse (as compared to human athletes); conversely, according to Gary G, *refusing* to apply ‘athlete’ to Secretariat would be to *undervalue* the abilities of Secretariat. Music genre disputes, such as (24),

⁷⁴ To be sure, this depends on context—as ‘athlete’ might sometimes be used purely descriptively or even have *negative* connotations (e.g. “I don’t expect grades to be very high; there are a lot of athletes in the class...”)—but, in a context in which interlocutors are discussing the “100 Best Athletes”, it can reasonably be assumed that ‘athlete’ has pronounced positive connotations.

also illustrate how a classificatory judgement might function as an implicit evaluation of the subject of predication. Suppose that Destro700 thinks that, as a genre, industrial music is aesthetically superior to dubstep. If this is so, then Destro700 most likely intends, in part, to counter what he considers to be an undervaluing of the band when he asserts that Nine Inch Nails is not dubstep but industrial. Meanwhile, DV8RZ is likely to share Destro700's favorable regard of music called 'industrial'; DV8RZ, however, is dismissive of newer synth-based rock bands like Nine Inch Nails. In depriving Nine Inch Nails of the 'industrial' label, DV8RZ effectively expresses a negative evaluation of the band's music. For a similar example, suppose that the author typically favors avant-garde music over any generation of "industrial"; thus, for the author, to say "Einstürzende Neubauten is not industrial; they are avant-garde" is to express a positive evaluation—elevating Einstürzende Neubauten from the relatively insipid ranks of typical industrial music to high art.

Or, for one other example, consider (29):

(29) DallasBryan:
 Arthur Browns not prog. ... Arthur Brown's Kingdom Comes -
 JOURNEY album is not PROG. ... Arthur chose to experiment with the
 Bently drum machine on this recording making him a New Age artists!
 Arthur must be punished! ...

Philippe:
 [I]f Arthur Brown is not prog, I suggest to consider stuffs as King
 Crimson, ELP and Genesis as pop music! ARTHUR BROWN IS PROG
 GOD DAMNED!!⁷⁵

Note that (29) takes place on the Progressive Rock Archives forums, where 'prog' is used

⁷⁵ "Arthur Browns Not Prog" (April 8-9, 2005) Prog Archives Forum.
 <http://www.progarchives.com/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=4996>.

as a term of approbation for music that displays virtuosity, intelligence, and complexity in composition beyond that of mainstream rock and pop (which progressive rock devotees are likely to consider boring); for a band or artist to merit the ‘prog’ label is to rise above the comparatively dull and unoriginal herd. (Notice, incidentally, that ‘pop’ is used as a term of derision by the second speakers in both (24) and (29).) Thus, in (29), DallasBryan appears to use the declaration that Arthur Brown is “not prog” as an poignant opening blow in his tirade against the artist’s experimentation with drum machines—and when Philippe declares that Arthur Brown “is prog goddamned,” he most likely intends to express a positive evaluation of Arthur Brown to counter DallasBryan’s attack.

Sometimes, simply depriving a person or object of a special label can be construed as a negative evaluation of that person or object. Indeed, this seems to explain, in part, the vituperative responses of the laity to the astronomers’ decision to demote Pluto from its planet status: depriving Pluto of the label ‘planet’ was, in the eyes of many speakers, to undervalue Pluto. A variety of other examples could be given. Consider, for one more type of case, arguments about whether certain “alternative” practitioners like chiropractors or naturopaths are “doctors,” as reflected in (19). Doctors are typically accorded a good deal of esteem in our society. Thus, the Chiropractic Awareness Council most likely worries that chiropractors are being undervalued by individuals who harbor the “common belief” that chiropractors are not doctors. (Meanwhile, those on the other side of the debate might worry that individuals overvalue chiropractors when they apply the label ‘doctor’ to them.)

To be sure, not all merely verbal disputes involve conflicting evaluative attitudes toward the subject of predication itself. Do Ishmael and Linnaeus disagree about how positively or negatively to value *whales*? It seems unlikely. Or take this exchange in which the author once took part:

- (30) A:
These cookies contain no sugar. They are sweetened only with maple syrup.
- B:
So they *do* contain sugar then...

Do the speakers differ in their valuing of the cookies? Not necessarily. (In fact, both enjoyed the taste of the cookies.) Cases (16) and (30) seem to share the salient characteristics of the motivating examples (i.e. FD Shape); they do not, however, seem to be cases in which the *subject of predication* is the target of the second speaker's counter-evaluation. The diagnosis in §4.1, although important to many examples, clearly does not apply to *all* merely verbal disputes; however, there remain other ways in which the initial utterance can pose a target for evaluation.

4.2 The Property Being Predicated

In §4.1, we examined cases in which, in ascribing 'F' to *a*, a speaker expresses an evaluation of *a*. Another possibility is that disputants differ in their evaluations of "F-ness" (although they might not differ in their evaluation of *a*).⁷⁶ This possibility arises

⁷⁶ Some readers might object that there is no one property of "F-ness" that is denoted by both A and B's uses of 'F'. I submit, however, that B's response occurs inside a pretense or presupposition that there *is* such a property; this, I take it, is part and parcel of feigning

when A applies ‘F’ only to things that A values negatively or positively, while B does not use ‘F’ with such a restriction—or vice versa. In such cases, A’s initial ascription of ‘F’ to *a* reveals information about how A values “F-ness,” and B’s refusal to ascribe ‘F’ to *a* reveals that B does not share A’s attitude toward “F-ness.” Although perhaps less stereotypical, this possibility seems to obtain in some merely verbal disputes.

I do not believe that, so far, any of motivating examples seem clearly to meet this description; it is, however, worth pointing out some instances of the phenomenon. For a case that is perhaps familiar to many philosophers, consider a dispute over whether or not Ayn Rand is a “philosopher.” It is possible that neither speaker in such an exchange finds much of intellectual value in Rand’s work—but that one speaker generally appreciates the talents of philosophers, while the other considers there to little of merit in philosophy in general. Moreover, some music genre disputes—although, presumably, not (24) or (29)—might manifest such a tension in attitudes toward a certain genre. For instance, my father and I both enjoy Pink Floyd. While I once considered myself connoisseur of progressive rock, however, my father does not consider himself to be fan of the genre—and, indeed, he has come to regard ‘prog’ as a pejorative label for (roughly) music that is too radio-unfriendly to be a hit. I once stated that Floyd was “prog” only to be met with his rejoinder “They are not!” (apparently aghast that I applied this pejorative label to a good band). I persisted with my claim, in part to attempt to alter his negative view of prog rock. Even clearer example might arise with respect to the labeling of social

objectivity! Thus, I will continue to speak of “F-ness” (in scare quotes!) as the target of evaluation in the cases at hand.

subgroups—such as, say, ‘foodies’.⁷⁷ Some speakers use the term ‘foodie’ value-neutrally (or even positively) to apply to food-lovers who engage in certain practices (e.g. preparing own foods from scratch, including experimentation novel and unusual dishes, seeking out all of gourmet restaurants, food trucks, and hole-in-the-wall ethnic eateries for new eating experiences, etc.). Others assume ‘foodie’ to have a distinctly negative connotation—and reserve its use for the those who might engage in the aforementioned behavior but who are snobbish and superficial. Thus, certain disputes over whether an individual is a “foodie” might reflect different valuations of “foodie-hood” (if you will).

4.3 The Criteria for Classification and a Speaker’s Values

Above, we examined speech acts in which applying ‘F’ to *a* acts as an implicit (or explicit) evaluation of *a*. In performing such speech acts, a speaker provides the opportunity for others to issue evaluations of *a* (§4.1)—or, in some less stereotypical cases, the speaker indicates how she values the property of “F-ness,” thereby posing a target for speakers who value “F-ness” differently (§4.2). Although I believe that these diagnoses are helpful to understand the tension present in many merely verbal disputes, they do not generalize to all cases—as anticipated at the end of §4.1. Recall that examples (16) and (30)—concerning whether whales are “fish” and whether certain cookies “contain sugar” if they are sweetened with only maple syrup—do not manifest conflicting evaluative attitudes toward whales or the cookies (nor, as we might add in

⁷⁷ Johnston and Baumann demonstrate that ‘foodie’ is a contentious label among those to whom it is typically applied. While some embrace the label, many disdain it (cf. pp. 54ff).

light of §4.2, toward fishes or sugar). I submit, however, that even these exchanges manifest differences between the speakers' values and interests. This leads to a third way in which the initial speaker in a merely verbal dispute can establish a target of evaluation: simply by making a classificatory judgement, she might reveal that she employs a mode of classification that is *itself* positively or negatively valued by others in her community. Divergent uses of a predicate often reflect underlying differences in the way that speakers group objects, and these underlying differences in groupings often reflect differences in what speakers attend to and care about. Finally, certain speakers might consider their own interests and concerns to be superior, in some sense, to those of others. This point is perhaps most clearly illustrated by example.

Take, for instance, disputes between scientists and “the folk” over the replacement of traditional classificatory schemes with novel, scientifically-based taxonomies—as exemplified by (16) and (17). When Ishmael asserts that “whales are fish,” for instance, he makes clear that he places value on the honoring of tradition—including traditional taxonomies of the animal kingdom—as opposed to bowing to modern science. The modern protest that “Pluto *is* a planet” admits of similar diagnosis: to insist that Pluto is a planet is to show respect for something of a cultural artifact, while to concede that Pluto is *not* a planet might suggest to some that one is overly obsequious to modern science. Note here that this information about speakers' values is revealed solely due to their commitment to the use of certain application conditions for ‘fish’ or ‘planet’ (as evidenced through their applying, or not applying, these predicates to whales or Pluto); the disputants need not have any particular evaluative attitude towards whales

or Pluto, or fish or planets, *per se* in order for their utterances to expose a clash of values.

Once again, moreover, music genre provide excellent examples of the phenomenon. When individuals assert, for instance, “Nine Inch Nails is industrial,” “Taylor Swift is country,” “Styx is progressive rock,” or “Dimmu Borgir is black metal,” they reveal—at least to those familiar with the respective genres and artists—that they apply these genre labels rather liberally. They probably defer to mainstream DJs and music critics, or to friends and acquaintances who are influenced by such, for the application of these genre labels; they are unlikely to be heavily invested in researching the respective genres, and are unlikely to seek out obscure bands and albums within them. Contrarily, when speakers assert the negations of these sentences, they reveal their endorsement of stricter classificatory criteria. In the latter cases, listeners might infer that the speakers value closer ties to the “roots” or to “old school” exemplars of the genre in question—as in the case of DV8RZ in (23)—and, perhaps further, that they are individuals of the sort who are likely to dig much deeper than mainstream radio when seeking out music. It is worth note, again, this phenomenon is to some degree independent of the speakers’ attitudes toward the artists, and even the genre, in question—since one might value authenticity in music in general, even with respect to those genres that one does not particularly enjoy, or be across-the-board indifferent toward authenticity or tradition.

Similar observations apply to our examples concerning the classification of food and drink. When Bbarton713 applies ‘martini’ to drink made of gin, lime juice, elderflower cordial, bitters, basil, and mint, one might infer that he knows little about

traditional cocktail ingredients—or, if he is familiar with the traditional IBA guidelines, that he does *not* value tradition and authenticity above conformity to the now-common glassware-based classificatory scheme for drinks (and, perhaps, that he is not a dedicated cocktail connoisseur). In contrast, when PozzSka replies that the drink “isn’t a Martini”, one can infer that she is a cocktail purist (to some degree)—that she is fairly knowledgeable about what ingredients are traditionally used in cocktails, and unwilling to apply a label like ‘martini’ merely on the basis of the type of glassware in which an alcoholic drink is served. This might further suggest that PozzSka has a more refined appreciation of alcoholic beverages than speakers like Bbarton713 or Jmallen5—given that the latter seem to discriminate between types of cocktails on the basis of very superficial criteria. Likewise, suppose that an individual utters “Here are some bagels” while pointing to a Thomas’ brand product on the supermarket shelves. She would thereby reveal that she uses ‘bagel’ in its more superficial, “corporate mainstream” sense; she is content to classify bread products on the basis of the labels provided by their producers and/or on the basis of their outward shape and appearance (e.g. round with a hole in the middle). Again, this might suggest a lack of refinement in her taste for baked goods. On the other hand, when Arthur Schwartz complains that Thomas’ so-called “bagels” are “not bagels at all,” his classificatory decision reveals that superficial appearance is *not* what he deems important in his engagement with baked goods; what matters instead are details concerning ingredients and preparation. He might be thought, then, to have more sophisticated tastes.

Many more examples could be given in which differences in classification reveal

differences in values and interest. Suppose, for example, that a staff member at a gym refers to “power yoga” as ‘yoga’. In doing so, she indicates a willingness to co-classify physical exercise on the basis of, say, incorporating many postures commonly associated with yoga—or, perhaps, on the basis of its being called “yoga” by other fitness experts (of the sort to whom she is disposed to defer). Others, though, would refuse to apply ‘yoga’ to this activity. These dissenters likely express deference to Eastern traditions—and reveal that their disesteem the attempted appropriation of these traditions by fitness-obsessed Westerners. Or consider an individual (say, Chuck) who eats no meat, dairy, or eggs—but he owns and wears a wool sweater and a leather shoes. Some in our society would assent to “Chuck is a vegan” (on the basis of his diet); others would adamantly deny it (on the basis of his apparel). Most individuals in the latter camp believe that it is morally wrong to use animals for personal consumption in any way—whether as food, clothing, or for the testing of cosmetics. This moral commitment is reflect in the stance that someone who merely refuses to *eat* animal-derived products deserves no special classificatory label. Those who lack such moral commitments, though, are likely to see little problem in classifying individuals as “vegan” on the sole basis of diet—since, after all, dietary restrictions are often socially important in themselves. In all of these cases, differences in classificatory decisions reflect and reveal differences in value and interest.

The same basic phenomenon is also apparent in our other motivating examples. Take (23): when the Korean teachers apply ‘cold’ to 65° temperatures, they reveal information about their tolerance for certain temperature ranges—and lasoro70 might well consider their low tolerance for “cold” temperatures to reflect a lack of heartiness

(i.e. lasoro⁷⁰ might think that they are wimps in virtue of applying ‘cold’ to 65° temperatures). As suggested at the end of §3.2, I believe that to deny that certain temperatures are “hot” or “cold” is often to implicitly issue a negative assessment of a speaker in virtue of his intolerance for temperature extremes. Deeper tensions over standards of application are also most likely present in a case like (10). When MILF Mommy ascribes ‘fat’ to women of size 12, she reveals that she has stricter standards of thinness than others in her society. This, in turn, suggests to many—including many respondents to her blog post—that she values a certain aesthetic ideal over women’s mental and physical well-being. Mayay, in contrast, reveals that she rejects this aesthetic ideal by refusing to apply ‘fat’ to women of size 12.

In short, in all of the above examples, the speakers’ classificatory judgements are colored by their values, interests, or perspectives—which themselves might be evaluated as better or worse values, interests, or perspectives.⁷⁸ Note that the present possibility does not exclude those discussed in §4.1 and §4.2. On the contrary, there might be many cases in which the response in a merely verbal dispute serves both as a contrary evaluation of the subject of discussion *and* as a negative evaluation of the initial

⁷⁸ For a somewhat different type of example, we might also note that the *precision* or *fine-grainedness* of one’s classificatory schemes may reveal information about one’s sensitivity to detail—and this in itself might be valued (or disvalued) by other speakers. Consider, for example, an individual who refers to certain colors as ‘lilac’, ‘wisteria’, and ‘periwinkle’ (instead of ‘purple’, ‘purple’, and ‘purple’), or who refers to certain bands as ‘post-black metal’, ‘funeral doom metal’, and ‘atmosphere sludge metal’ (instead of ‘metal’, ‘metal’, and ‘metal’). In my experience, facility in employing extremely fine-grained sub-genre names functions as a sort of cultural capital within certain music-based subcultures; it seems to signal experience and epistemic authority with respect to the music. No doubt that similar observations apply to experts on wine, liquor, cheese, coffee, chocolate, and so on.

speaker's criteria for applying the predicate in use. Indeed, many of our motivating examples appear to be such cases. However, the possibility discussed in §4.3 seems to generalize to even more exemplars of merely verbal disputes.

5. Implicit Evaluation and Feigned Contradiction

In §4, we witnessed several ways in which the expression of a classificatory judgement might establish a target for evaluation from other speakers. To recap, take our schematic case in which A says “*a* is F” (or “*a* is not F”) and B replies “*a* is not F” (or “*a* is F”). B's reply might serve as a evaluation of *a* itself—while, in other cases, it might function as a evaluation of “F's” or “F-ness” (where this should be understood internal to a pretense in which A and B's uses of ‘F’ denote one common property of “F-ness”). And perhaps more interestingly—and characteristic of a wider range of merely verbal disputes—B's reply might serve as a negative evaluation of *A's standards for applying ‘F’*.

The previous investigation of possible targets of evaluation goes some way to explain and justify the thesis that the respondent in a merely verbal dispute expresses an evaluation. As should be clear from §4, B's utterance reveals information about B's values and interests (and so on) in much the same way that A's utterance reveals such information about A. Thus, by denying A's utterance of “*a* is F” (or “*a* is not F”), B can reveal that B's attitude toward *a* differs from that of A, that B's attitude toward “Fs” differs from that of A, and/or that B does not share the values and interests (or other background factors) that underlie A's application conditions for ‘F’. At the least, then, B can use an utterance of “*a* is not F” (or “*a* is F”) to convey to B's audience that B's values

differ from those of A. This, however, does not entirely suffice to explain B's verbal behavior. Specifically, what remains in need of explanation is why it is felicitous for B to *deny* A's utterance—in a way that, as discussed in Chapter 1, appears no different syntactically from what would be observed in a stereotypical dispute over the *fact of the matter* as to whether *a* is F.

Following Chapter 2, it is my contention that—as in objectively-framed disputes about taste—B intentionally employs the syntax that he does (viz. the syntax associated with disputes about matters of fact) as a *trope*. Although arguably *inaccurate*, this syntax is no more misleading than hyperbole or metaphor. Generalizing the conclusions of Chapter 2 with respect to disputes about taste, “feigning objectivity” is a rhetorical strategy by which the respondent in a merely verbal dispute frames the initial speaker *as if* she is wrong about an objective fact. This framing helps to convey the respondent's commitment to the superiority of his own standards for applying the predicate in use.

To remind: I argued in Chapter 2 that framing a reply *as if* its content contradicts that of an initial utterance can—in some contexts—yield rhetorical force even if the sentences do not literally express contradictory contexts. This is due to the resultant suggestion—even if inaccurate—that the respondent judges the initial speaker to speak falsely about an objective matter of fact. I submit that the use of “feigned contradiction” as a trope is not limited to disputes about matters of taste. Indeed, the same device seems to be at work in many stereotypical merely verbal disputes—in which the respondent exploits the *suggestion* that the initial speaker is factually mistaken in order to suggest that the application conditions that she employs are not legitimate. The respondent, in

essence, *treats* the initial speaker as using the same application conditions as himself (or, perhaps better, as obliged to defer to his usage) but *getting the facts wrong*. In doing so, he projects confidence and assuredness in his own standards for using the predicate in question—and, correspondingly, those values, interests, and perspectives, that lie behind them.

Suppose, in contrast, that the respondent in a merely verbal dispute were to disambiguate the predicate in use by explicitly treating it as ambiguous or context sensitive—as proponents of the dismissive approach would urge. Suppose, for example, that lasoro⁷⁰ were to say “15-20 degrees [Celsius] is not cold by my standards,” Mayay were to say “A size 12 is NOT fat by my lights,” PozzSka were to say “No offense meant, but that isn’t what I and other purists call a ‘martini’,” or Emerson York were to say “Pluto should be called a ‘planet’!!!!!!” Arguably, this clarifies the basic nature of the dispute (although it might seem to offer little *improvement* in clarity, since the nature of the dispute in these cases is presumably transparent to most speakers even as they are actually framed). But what the change in framing *does* accomplish, I submit, is to implicitly legitimate the standards employed by the initial speaker for applying the predicate in use. Even if the speakers proceed to argue that their own standards are in some way preferable or superior, they acknowledge that other standards may rationally be employed. As these disputes are actually framed, however, B effectively treats ‘F’ as univocal (i.e. by directly denying A’s utterance with no disambiguation)—and, in doing so, frames A as employing a false theory of the property of F-ness, as bad at detecting F-ness, as ignorant about what does and does not instantiate F-ness, or as possessing some

such flaw or mistake in her beliefs about the objective world. B does *not* portray A as merely using ‘F’ to denote a different extension than B does by his use of ‘F’ (and thereby expressing a true proposition), even though philosophers such as Hirsch would argue that this is precisely what B *should* do.

B’s actual choice of framing should make sense, however, when we consider that B’s goals include expressing to his audience that he considers his standards for applying ‘F’ to be superior to those adopted by A. In brief, I hold that the syntactic shape of stereotypical merely verbal disputes is rationalized due to the psychological impact of the implicit suggestion that A is not merely employing an ambiguous or context-sensitive word in a different sense from B but *wrong about the facts*; using a word differently from B is surely a minor charge compared to being wrong about what objects have what properties—especially if, as seems likely, B would be forced to concede that A asserts something *true* given the property that A uses ‘F’ to denote. In Chapter 2, I analogized the use of “feigned contradiction” to hyperbolic denouncements of one’s interlocutors as “crazy” or “mad”; the form of B’s response insinuates that A is mistaken or incompetent. This, in turn, conveys B’s assuredness and resoluteness in his commitment to his own use of ‘F’ as opposed to that of A.

Certainly, like speakers in objectively-framed taste disputes, many speakers in stereotypical merely verbal disputes—especially the respondents—often feel committed to their claims in an affectively-laden way. On this point, we might here note the use of other devices for emphasis in some of our motivating examples—including Mayay’s “OMG!!” in (10), Emerson York’s liberal use of exclamation points in (17) (as well as

the more modest use of exclamation points in other examples), Destro700's use of capitalization in (24), and Gary G's reference to Doug as "the idiot" in (14). We might also note uses of hyperbole such as, perhaps, DV8RZ's statement that Trent Reznor's music "resembles industrial in no way at all." I submit that the use of the direct denial is, first and foremost, simply another device for emphasis or intensification. The respondent in a merely verbal dispute not only replies as he does *despite* recognizing that the two speakers apply the predicate according to different standards; he replies in this manner *because* he recognizes this, and wishes to call attention to this difference—and impugn the standards employed by the initial speaker—in an emphatic manner.

This concludes the core of my proposed explanation and justification of merely verbal disputes. In the remainder of this section, I briefly address a follow-up question: what does B hope to accomplish by voicing such an evaluation? Note that, if our goal is simply to justify B's verbal behavior, an answer to this follow-up question is not strictly needed: as long as B has some reason or other to express such an evaluation, B's behavior is linguistically justifiable. Addressing the further question of what B might wish to accomplish, however, is useful in demonstrating the generalizability of my account of merely verbal disputes—in contrast, especially, to the negotiation view. My proposal allows that some merely verbal disputes *do* aim at the coordination of word meaning, but it can meanwhile accommodate the variety of cases seen in §3 to be problematic for this view.

Importantly, my account of merely verbal disputes as "feigned contradiction" is *neutral* on the question of whether the respondent B desires to convince the initial

speaker A—or other addressees or overhearers—to adopt B’s standards for applying the predicate in use. If B *does* desire this, then this itself seems to provide B with a reason to issue an implicit negative evaluation of A’s standards for applying ‘F’. Indeed, my account provides a pragmatic explanation of why invoking a merely verbal dispute can advance B’s goals in cases of negotiation as well: by projecting B’s confidence and resoluteness in his own standards for applying ‘F’ (as opposed to those of A), B’s response presents B as an authority on the matter. At the very least, it evinces B’s unwillingness to defer to A for the proper standards of application; thus, observers of the exchange might be nudged to treat B, rather than A, as the authority (and, of course, A might reply by denying B’s utterance as a means to counter this).

But there are other reasons for which B might issue such an evaluation. One possibility is that B does so *merely* to take a stand—to go on record as disavowing the values and interests endorsed by A, as manifest by A’s application of ‘F’ to *a* (or, as the case might be, A’s refusal to apply ‘F’ to *a*). And, I presume, B might do *this* simply because (for example) it is important to B’s self-image that B believes that his audience perceives him in a certain way; he does not want to think that his audience conceives of him as being “like A” in certain key respects. In (23), for example, lasoro70 might not want to be perceived as the sort of person who finds 65°F to be cold; possibly, in lasoro70’s value system, the Korean teachers’ low tolerance for cold is a mark of wussiness—and lasoro70 does not want to others to think that he too is a wuss. The importance to speakers of preserving a self-concept might be even more apparent in “purist vs mainstream” altercations such as (15) and (24). A cocktail purist might not

want to be caught dead giving tacit assent to the application of ‘martini’ to Bbarton713’s concoction, nor a diehard rivethead giving tacit assent to the application ‘industrial’ to Nine Inch Nails. These speakers’ tastes and preferences—including their appreciation of purity, authenticity, and tradition—are likely to form a central part of their conception of themselves as individuals, as distinct from the masses who lack such specialized knowledge and discernment. By objecting to the “defilement” of these labels, they express their disassociation from the latter—an action which is significant in its own right.

We might also note here that B does not necessarily intend his response *for A*—and when B replies to A’s utterance *on behalf of an audience not including A*, who perhaps *share* B’s perspective and values, B’s disaffiliation from A’s standards might have the additional function of promoting solidarity (with his addressees, that is, not with A). When B speaks in the presence only of others who *agree* with him, B’s reply provides his interlocutors with the opportunity to criticize a representative from an out-group whose perspective and values they neither share nor endorse. (Note that some of our examples above involved replies to non-specified or generic adversaries.)

An even weaker possibility, perhaps, is that B replies as he does merely to *vent*—irrespective of how his audience thereupon perceives him, and irrespective of whether or not his audience comes to adopt his criteria for applying ‘F’. This might occur when A expresses an implicit negative evaluation of something that B greatly likes (or an implicit positive evaluation of something B despises)—or even of B himself. It could be that lasoro70 enjoys the weather, and posts what he does simply because he is sick and tired

of hearing the Korean teachers complain about it. In the text from which (10) is drawn, Mayay states that she sometimes wears a size 12; thus, presumably, she is primed to hear it as a personal affront when another speaker says “Size 12, you’re fat!” Mayay is no doubt offended, and she reacts. On similar lines, an traditional industrial music fan (e.g. a fan of Neubauten and Throbbing Gristle) who despises Nine Inch Nails might just not be able to take it if she hears Nine Inch Nails called ‘industrial’ one more time.

It should now be apparent that the account on which the respondent expressively “feigns contradiction” has the resources to accommodate many of the disputes presented in §3, which were seen to be problematic for the negotiation view. Initiating a merely verbal dispute might function *merely* to allow the respondent to clarify his alliances (to a certain subculture, for example, or regional or cultural heritage). The preceding account can also explain why it can be rational for a speaker to engage in merely verbal disputes even when she recognizes that she lacks the power or authority to effect any community-wide changes in the standards by which speakers apply the predicate in use. For example, when a non-scientist declares “I don’t care what the IAU says; Pluto *is* a planet,” she symbolically disaffiliates from the IAU’s devaluing of the traditional taxonomy of celestial bodies—and manifests her own differing values. Or consider cases of negative self-assessment—such as Sidelle’s ‘fat’ example discussed in §3.1. I submit, in such a scenario, the husband primary objective is to go on record—before his wife and any other overhearers—that he does not share the wife’s perception of herself as fat. On the present account, the use of the direct denial is justifiable as lending emphasis to the husband’s rejection of his wife’s using ‘fat’ in a way that applies to herself; it is not necessary that

the husband additionally aspire to coordination a common meaning of ‘fat’.

In any of the previous settings, the respondent has reason to voice an evaluation of a target established by the initial speaker’s utterance—and, on the view sketched in Chapter 2 and reiterated here, the direct denial can be used for this purpose. B’s reply enables him to go on record as not sharing A’s evaluation of *a*, A’s criteria for applying ‘F’, or (more broadly) A’s system of valuing, socio-cultural background, or so on. And it is easily imaginable that B would want such distinctions between himself and A to be recognized *for their own sake* (perhaps because the underlying values or perspective form an important part of B’s self-concept) without also desiring that others become more like B (or less like A) in this respect. This agrees with §3: sometimes B might *not* desire the latter—and it might be undesirable from societal-level functional perspective that such reconciliation occur.

6. Conclusions: The Neglected Role of Evaluation

In Chapter 4, I have stressed that classification and evaluation can be tightly connected—and that this is crucial to understanding the aims and functions of merely verbal disputes. It is worth pointing out, in closing, that proponents of the negotiation view have not been oblivious to the close connections between classification and value—nor have they entirely ignored the role that differences in interest and value play in merely verbal disputes. They have, however, stopped short of interpreting the respondent’s speech act itself as an act of evaluation.

More specifically, advocates of the negotiation view have noted two ways in

which value plays a role in merely verbal disputes: first, differences in value sometimes underlie the differences between the disputants' conditions for applying the predicate in use; second, the way in which a speaker comes to classify *a* may influence the way in which that speaker comes to value *a*. On the one end, then, current proponents of the negotiation view admit that values and interests can influence classification—and, in turn, might underlie the different uses of a predicate in a merely verbal dispute. Richard, for example, states that “[h]ow we shape the boundaries of our concepts is in part determined by our interests and values” and that disputants “may rationally differ on the relative importance we place on competing considerations” (p. 112); for example, “[w]hether a field is flat enough for some activity turns in part on the interests of those who are to perform the activity. Given one way of balancing interests, the field is flat enough; given others it’s not” (pp. 120-121), and “[w]hether something or someone is correctly classified as a chair or a cheapskate, a melody, modern, morose, or misanthropic depends in any number of ways on our interests and values” (p. 121). And, on the other end, proponents of the view have sometimes noted that to accept a certain classificatory judgement can be, in part, to accept a different evaluative outlook. Authors like Plunkett and Sundell and Ludlow, for example, have invoked facts about the impact of classification on evaluation when they argue that the negotiation of meaning is often an activity of great social and political significance (cf. Plunkett and Sundell’s discussion of the dispute over whether waterboarding is aptly called ‘torture’ and Ludlow’s detailed investigations of whether fetuses should be classified as “persons” or marital rape should be called such).

The negotiation view, therefore, allows that these dual factors—the influence of value on classification, and the influence of classification on value—enable merely verbal disputes to serve as “fronts” for disputes as to whose interests should prevail. What my view crucially adds, however, is that the denial of a classificatory judgement can be an act of evaluation *in itself*. Given this, it is not necessary to assume further that merely verbal disputes are the sorts of argument that even *aim at* resolution—for, as pointed out above, a speaker might express such an evaluation for many reasons, including merely to take a stand (e.g., notably, to flag himself as *different from* the initial speaker in some respect important to his self-concept). My view allows, then, that the respondent’s expression of evaluation might be *merely this*, without further being an attempt to negotiate common standards for applying a predicate. This, I believe, yields an interpretation of merely verbal disputes that is just as charitable as the negotiation view but much more generalizable and descriptively accurate.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

I have now completed the crucial work in analyzing and interpreting a *prima facie* peculiar class of disputes—disputes that share the surface syntax of stereotypical “objective” or “factual” disputes, even though the differences between the speakers’ avowed commitments can be chalked up to differences in their application conditions for the predicates in use, and which are prone to occur *even though* the disputants themselves are aware of the latter differences. Many such disputes are *not* sincere arguments about the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence contested by the speaker—but, at the same time, this does not imply that speakers who engage in such activities are silly or incompetent. Instead, I have argued, framing disputes *as objective* is a trope that can be employed to rhetorical effect in contexts in which speakers have conversational aims beyond the mere exchange of information; what superficially appears as dispute over some proposition can instead be a “front” for affective-charged expressions of differences in value.

In this brief concluding chapter, I recapitulate the importance and novelty of the idea of “feigning objectivity” in philosophical interpretation of disputes that occur among ordinary speakers, and I re-emphasize the fact that this framework highlights significant but often-ignored commonalities between conversational activities that have traditional been discussed in entirely different bodies of philosophical literature: alleged “faultless”

disputes, such as those concerning personal taste, and “merely verbal” disputes (§1). I forecast a “sociolinguistic turn” when analyzing when speakers choose the objective frame, as opposed to the also available subjective frame, for a given dispute—briefly limning the shape of account with respect to disputes about taste (§2). Finally, picking up especially on Chapter 3, I provide assurance that the view advanced in this dissertation is compatible with—and, in fact, *predicts*—differences in the *actual frequency* with which certain predicates or types of predicates occur in disputes characterized by feigned objectivity.

1. Feigned Objectivity and the Varieties of Disputation

It has become philosophical orthodoxy to assume that objectively-framed disputes—or, at least, objectively-framed disputes of concern to philosophy—are licensed only when a conversational aim of the disputants is to achieve agreement on the truth-value of the contested sentence or sentences.

More to the point: the orthodox conception assumes that, in the standard situation in which Disputant A asserts *S* and Disputant B asserts *Not-S*, A has the goal of persuading B to assent to *S* and B has the goal of persuading A to assent to *Not-S* (i.e. to deny *S*). It has little to say about contexts in which A and B lack this basic conversational goal; the standing presumption, perhaps, is that *of course* A and B aim to convert one another to their respective positions (for they would not be arguing otherwise!). This implicit assumption has permeated philosophical discussion of disputes about matters of taste, disputes concerning borderline cases of vague predicates, and so-called “merely

verbal” disputes—and its unquestioned presence has thwarted investigation into the full range of reasons for which speakers engage in such activities and, in turn, the full range of justifications for the invocation of what I have described as the “objective frame.” The assumption underlies both the demand to account for “genuine” disagreement in disputes about taste—lest these common activities be interpreted as silly or pointless (cf. Chapter 1, §1)—and the uncharitable stereotype of alleged merely verbal dispute as indeed silly and pointless (cf. Chapter 4, §1). And this, I have argued, fatally ignores the important role of *evaluation* in the settings of such disputes, as well as the potential use of negation in covert evaluative acts.

A further typical assumption is that objectively-framed disputes are licensed only if the proposition that A expresses by *S* *contradicts* the proposition that B expresses by *Not-S*. As I reviewed in Chapter 1, this assumption—that the speakers do, or at least should, hold themselves bound to *Contradiction Norm*—undergirds most of the dispute in philosophy of language regarding apparent “faultless disagreement” about matters of taste (and, as added in Chapter 3, about borderline cases of vague scalar predicates). I deny this—for I hold that *merely feigned* “objective” denials can be useful rhetorical devices, and thus that denial can be apt even in the absence of genuine contradiction. We have seen in Chapter 4, however, that I am not the first to reject the premise that all rational disputes are governed by Contradiction Norm; in particular, proponents of the Negotiation View also deny this assumption, holding that the “shape” of contradiction is also licensed when speakers aim to generate *convergence* on a shared meaning of an initially ambiguous or underdetermined term. Importantly, though, even proponents of

the Negotiation View implicit accept the orthodox tenet that the disputes that they investigate (e.g. disputes over borderline cases and other alleged “merely verbal” disputes) are conversational activities aimed at producing *agreement* on the truth of the contested sentence.

My view rejects this basic assumption—and, as such, accommodates a much wider range of data from ordinary conversational practices. In Chapter 2 (especially §4), I argued that disputes about taste occur for many reasons that are distinct from—and do not require—the goal that interlocutors come to share a common viewpoint on the matter of taste at issue. In fact, in some cases, the function of the dispute might be to signal speakers’ individuality or identification with a certain class of sub-culture—in virtue of speakers’ *distinct, un-shared* tastes. Furthermore, given the social importance of individual and group distinctions, any demand for convergence in tastes would seem not merely irrelevant but in fact counterproductive. Later, in Chapter 4, I extended parallel considerations to a variety of other disputes—including disputes over the application of vague predicates (e.g., especially, value-laden predicates like ‘rich’ and ‘fat’), names of music genres and other culturally-significant categories (e.g. ‘martini’ and ‘barbeque’), and even some apparent “natural kind” terms (e.g. ‘fish’ and ‘planet’), as well as many other predicates. I stressed that even apparently factual statements (like “Pluto is a planet”) can function as implicit expressions of value—and that, as with the enunciation of taste claims, speakers might assert and deny such sentences *merely* in acts of stance-taking, territory-marking, or expression of negative evaluations of (for example) other speakers and the values that undergird their classificatory schemes. To be sure, these are

not the *only* reasons for which speakers argue about matters of taste, classification, and so forth. In some cases, surely, speakers *do* aim to produce convergence in classification, perspective, or even subjective taste preferences. This assumption, however, is unnecessary to explain why it is rational for speakers to engage in objectively-framed disputes. The latter explanation requires only the recognition that (a) the speakers are reasonably interpreted as being engaged in implicitly evaluative acts and (b) the mere *pretense* of objective dispute generates rhetorical effect that can strengthen and intensify an expression of value.

A significant corollary conclusion is that disputes about matters of taste and “merely verbal” disputes, typically treated in philosophy as wholly distinct phenomena, share important similarities not only in their syntax but also in the rhetorical, pragmatic, social psychological, and sociological dimensions of their explanation. We simultaneously gain insight into *both* types of disputes when we recognize the pervasiveness of (a) implicit value judgements and (b) tropes that violate purported norms of conversation (e.g. Truth Norm and/or Contradiction Norm).

Meanwhile, though, we might add that disputes that *have* commonly been co-classified with “faultless” disputes about taste—most notably, disputes involving *epistemic modals*—emerge as importantly *dissimilar* from the types of exchanges that I have discussed in this dissertation. The omission of epistemic modals from my development and application of the account “feigned objectivity” is non-accidental; I believe that, due to striking disanalogies between the cases (e.g. the important datum that speakers who dispute epistemic modal claims usually *are* responsive to evidence in the

manner predicted of speakers who argue about matters of fact), stereotypical cases of disputes over epistemic modal claims are *not* aptly described as cases of (merely) feigned objectivity. (See Appendix A for further discussion.)

2. Objective vs Subjective: A Call for a “Sociolinguistic Turn”

Throughout this dissertation, and especially in Chapters 2 and 4, I have developed the position that *feigned objectivity*—a syntactically-reflected pretense or posturing *as if* speakers are disputing an objective matter of fact—is a type of trope, an intensifier, of frequent value in situations in which one speaker aims to devalue or discredit the explicitly or implicitly expressed tastes, values, perspectives, or standards of the other speaker. Nonetheless, though, speakers do not inevitably feign objectivity—even in situations in which one speaker considers the tastes, values, or standards reflected by her use of some predicate to be superior to those of her interlocutor. Disputes about matters of taste are often played out in explicitly subjective terms, for example, and disputes about labeling can be explicitly metalinguistic (e.g., say, “You call that ‘industrial’?! I wouldn’t call it that; I would call it ‘dubstep’”).

One avenue for further research, then, is to examine the factors that guide speakers to choose to frame a dispute in objective or subjective terms—if not, as we have seen, the demands of semantics. As I have anticipated at the end of Chapter 2, I believe that future research into this issue would profit from collaboration with sociolinguistics—and, in particular, the strands of the discipline that have been influenced by Brown and

Levinson's politeness theory (1987).⁷⁹ A central theme in Brown and Levinson's work is that speakers have two types of "face wants," which they describe as the want to be unimpeded or free from imposition ("negative face") and the want that others share and/or form a favorable opinion of our own preferences and desires ("positive face").⁸⁰ Correspondingly, Brown and Levinson identify two different broad classes of politeness strategies, individuated by the types of "face" that the strategies are designed to protect. Another part of the project is to specify the social factors and conversational aims that favor one sort of politeness strategy, "positive" or "negative," over the other. According to Brown and Levinson, there are three major contributing factors: relative social rank of the speakers (e.g. does one hold power or authority over the other?), social distance between the speakers (e.g. are they friends or strangers?), and the urgency of the demand being made on the interlocutor. Note, especially with respect to the last factor, that Brown and Levinson are primarily interested in settings in which one speaker makes a request or other imposition, and analyze strategies to mitigate the potential "threat to face." However, although the framework is also by no means unproblematic, it offers a useful starting point into examining the application of sociolinguistics to "feigned

⁷⁹ Although I believe that it contains a great deal of insight, I mention the Brown and Levinson framework primarily as an illustration (and I ignore many of its details); although well-known and influential, this formulation of politeness theory has been subject to much scrutiny in later sociolinguistic work on politeness and impoliteness. See, for example, Watts 2003 (esp. Chapter 4) for discussion.

⁸⁰ Even in their original terms, the formulation of positive face is ambiguous and a rightful target of criticism. But it is not my present purpose to criticize or suggest improvements to the framework—which, due to its fame, I do take to provide the basis for a first-pass illustration of one in which a sociolinguistic turn might go. In any case, the basic idea behind positive face—that, in general, we want our close acquaintances to share our values and interests—does, I think, have some merit.

objectivity” in disputes—if only as a very rough illustrative example.

It is an oversimplification, but a plausible hypothesis that, in general, use of the objective frame implicates authority and use of the subjective frame implicates deference. (This is what allows us to provide a neat explanation of the role of objective framing in situations in which speakers *do* desire that the other party comes to agree with them: typically, one is better positioned to pursue others if one has established oneself as confident and authoritative rather than uncertain and willing to defer.) We should expect, then, the subjective frame to predominate in the same types of conversational settings in which “negative politeness” is preferred: conversation with a superior (with respect to social rank or, perhaps, simply “expertise” on the subject matter at hand⁸¹), for example, or conversation with individuals who are socially distant. In contrast, we should predict the find the objective frame comparatively more often in conversations between friends and familiars of roughly equal social rank (and, again, perhaps also roughly equal experience or “expertise” regarding the topic of conversation).

Additionally, we should predict more frequent occurrences of the objective frame in contexts in which reconciliation to a common viewpoint is more urgent or important from the standpoint of the conversational participants. As an example of this contrast, we might consider a speaker who judges that temperature-tolerance-shaming is benign, whereas fat-shaming is a deleterious social ill; such a speaker, we presume, would retreat to the subjective frame much more readily in a dispute concerning whether an 80° F air

⁸¹ Brown and Levinson themselves primarily discuss the former; the latter, however, is also pertinent.

temperature is “hot” than one about whether a size-12 woman is “fat.” Similarly, sommelier might persist in the objective frame longer in an argument over which of two Bordeaux reds is more delicious than one over whether Andes mints are tastier than York’s Peppermint Patties—and a speaker with a greater esteem for science than mixology might advocate that “Pluto is not a planet” more insistently than she would hold out against frat boys in asserting “Appletinis are not martinis.”

Note that the above contrasts strengthen the point that my account does not seek to discredit the “negotiation” picture altogether; indeed, the circumstances in which a speakers has such coordinative aims may be paradigm situations in the objective frame is preferred to the subjective frame. At the same time, however, a politeness theory influenced account of the sociolinguistic dimensions of disputes can yield insight into why speakers sometimes adopt the objective frame even in conversational settings in which coordination is *not* the aim: the considerations concerning democracy and deference remain relevant in the latter sorts of cases, and we might mention say, mere passion—due to, e.g., the extent to which one’s tastes, values, etc. shape one’s self-concept—as another influence on the apparent urgency or importance of expressing one’s tastes, values, etc.

We must be careful, however, in applying politeness theory—especially in those situations, which I have often highlighted, in which convergence or coordination is *not* expected or demanded. In these situation, to recall, speakers might aim only to express their own tastes and values, or display their own heritage or cultural affiliation—or they might aim to express a negative evaluation of the standards and values that underlie

divergent judgements, or the speakers who espouse these standards and values, without further aiming to “convert” them. (To remind, a classic case of the later is a teenager who argues about musical taste with a parent; from the standpoint of many teens, coming to share musical tastes with mom and dad would be decidedly uncool.) The main reason for caution is that, on the surface, the fact speakers engage in objectively framed disputes *at all* in such contexts seems anomalous from the standpoint of politeness theory—or, at least, to fall outside the explanatorily bounds of the theory. And this is because objectively-frame disputes about taste, classification, and so on are not obviously “polite” in any respect.

The latter is true, I submit, not only according to our pre-theoretical sense of “politeness” but also—at least at first blush—on the formal definitions given in the Brown and Levinson framework. First, as I have already proposed, it seems clear that the subjective frame—rather than the objective frame—promotes what Brown and Levinson call “negative face” (the want to be unimpeded). When a speaker adopts the subjective frame, she thereby implicitly suggests that her interlocutors have the freedom and ability to decide upon their own tastes and preferences, their own perspectives for judging properties such a wealth or corpulence, their own classificatory schemes for music or mixed drinks, or what have you. Indeed, I have argued that it is the implicit *denial* of the freedom and ability to choose one’s own standards that gives the feigning of objectivity its rhetorical weight.

But it also seems that *in the context of disputes* the adoption of the objective frame may offend against Brown-and-Levinsonian *positive* face (the want that others

share our wants). Now, to be sure, Brown and Levinson themselves mention the objective frame as a device of positive politeness: on their view, to use the objective form of standard-dependent predicates is to presuppose that the addressee's standards for applying the predicate are the same as the speaker's (p. 123).⁸² In the case of taste predicates, this would be to presuppose that the addressee's *tastes and preferences* are the same as (or at least very close to) the speaker's.

It should not be surprising that Brown and Levinson consider the objective frame suited to play this role in polite behavior, given that they define "positive politeness" as "redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants...should be thought of as desirable" where, important, "[r]edress consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating that one's own wants (or some of them) are in some respects similar to the addressee's wants" (p. 101). Suggesting, via the adoption of the objective frame, that one's addressee shares one's tastes and preferences—or, perhaps better put, that one shares the tastes and preferences *of one's addressee*—is presumably a means to accomplish the latter.

Crucially, though, Brown and Levinson are not speaking about *disputes* in the preceding passage. When we do shift attention specifically to disputes, it becomes far less clear that the use of the objective frame can be explained as an act of ("positive")

⁸² Although this talk of presuppositions of commonality does not seem out-of-place in contemporary philosophy of language (cf., e.g., Egan 2010 on presuppositions of commonality in disputes about taste), Brown and Levinson stress different functions of such presupposition. The primary function of the presupposition, in their framework, is to frame the hearer as part of the in-group (and not necessarily, for instance, to facilitate the transfer of information).

politeness. My conjecture, to reiterate, is that a main function of objectively-framed denials is to effectively *delegitimate* an initial speaker's standards for applying a predicate—and, thereby, to suggest that the initial speaker is *objectively mistaken* (if not conceptually confused)—but this, to put things mildly, just doesn't sound like a very good means to convey “that one's own wants are in some respects similar to the addressee's wants.” Indeed, it might seem that emphasizing interpersonal *differences* in tastes, standards, and so on—by *any* means—might *impede* the attempt to discover and emphasize common interests, and the intensity and forcefulness provided by objective-framing might (if anything) make matters worse. Certainly, discussion of *common* tastes, preferences, and values in the objective frame might protect interlocutors' “positive face,” as Brown and Levinson have defined it, but it is not at all clear that dispute has the same effect. On the contrary, we might hypothesize that the demands of positive face, in this context, overlap with the demands of negative face in requiring speakers to avoid or mitigate disputation altogether—and this, again, seems to favor the use of *subjective* framing to soften the appearance of disagreement.⁸³

It will turn out, I believe, that a sociolinguistic account of the use of objective versus subjective framing in disputes must be complex and multifaceted—far exceeding the scope of our limited Brown and Levinson inspired sketch. Despite the initial *prima facie* anomaly, there are numerous settings in which objectively-framed disputes about

⁸³ Granted, this might be too hasty: perhaps, by adopting the objective frame, the speaker *does* implicate that the addressee is “one of us”; even though the addressee might have some “false” views, he is worth treating as working within the same conceptual scheme—rather than employing some divergent, alien one. But it would lead too far afield to argue about this nuance.

taste might be apt, and the rhetorical effect of the frame is slightly different in each context. For orientation, I will provide a brief and non-exhaustive summary of some such contexts—beyond those contexts in which convergence or coordination does seem to be the goal—situated in the tradition of politeness theory. In doing so, I will primarily refer to our central cases of disputes about taste; I believe, though, that the same considerations can be easily extended to the disputes examined in Chapters 3 and 4.

1. *Rudeness*. Arguably, it is not *polite* to directly deny an interlocutor's judgement of taste; in Brown and Levinson's terms, this act seems to offend against both positive *and* negative face by suggesting both that the respondent *doesn't* want what the initial speaker wants and that he denies the right of the initial speaker to determine her own likes and dislikes. But politeness considerations aren't always the paramount consideration governing a speaker's conversational contributions. Just as speakers might intentionally violate norms for the efficient transfer of information, including Truth Norm and Contradiction Norm, so too might speakers intentionally violate norms of politeness and tact (or, as in the case of disputes initiated by children, the respondents might be inadequately socialized into such norms).

2. *Good-Natured Teasing*. First, it should be stressed that violations of politeness norms are not necessarily rude. Indeed, in our society, *too* much attention to politeness and tact may cause a speaker to appear cold and detached, and teasing is often a device for building social solidarity. Another possibility, then, is that the interlocutors in a dispute about taste are comfortable enough that the respondent may adopt the objective frame in "teasing" the initial speaker for her different tastes.

In fact, I would hypothesize (although not presently argue) that the most stereotypical disputes about taste fall into this category. In these contexts, the argumentation may serve as a type of social ritual, in which there is no aim or expectation to generate any sort of consensus—no goal of changing the beliefs or non-cognitive attitudes of the participants in such a way that they will reach agreement on the truth of “*a* is *F*.” Instead, it might be that the activity of argumentation is its own end: although not designed to produce agreement, simply engaging in these activities engenders social bonds. Relatedly, teasing and banter—extending, most likely, to the teasing of interlocutors with “aberrant” tastes—is often, at least in our culture, a device to indicate social closeness. Tentatively, teasing another about their tastes seems to convey a message of this sort: “We know each other well enough to understand each other’s idiosyncratic preferences, and we’re comfortable enough with each other to make light of those preferences that just seem alien—without risk of offense.”

3. *Disagreement-Preferred Settings*.⁸⁴ That there are some situations in which disagreement is, in fact, *preferred*. Indeed, although these are most likely not the types of situations that we typically envision when imagining an objectively-framed dispute about taste, we have already encountered one such setting: Sidelle’s example, critiqued in Chapter 4, of the wife who calls herself “fat.” In such cases of negative self-assessment, disagreement is preferred in order to protect the initial speaker’s self-esteem.⁸⁵ It is not

⁸⁴ I follow Pomerantz (1984) in my use of this label.

⁸⁵ Another example of a disagreement-preferred setting emerged while writing this chapter: I sent a former colleague a text message in which I referred to some of my work (which he was reading at the time) as a “piece of crap.” He replied, appropriately, “Well,

hard to think of situations in which the polite thing to do *is* to tell an interlocutor “No, you’re wrong,” as exemplified by cases in which a speaker criticizes himself (e.g. “I’m not attractive at all”) or his work (e.g. “That old painting is hideous” or “Oh no, this soup turned out yucky”).

4. *Initial Speaker as an Out-Group Representative*. It is not essential to an FD-Shaped dispute that the initial speaker—whose position is impugned—is among the respondent’s addressees. Thus, it is possible (and easy) to construct contexts in which, although the respondent disagrees with the *initial speaker*, he *agrees with his addressees*. Indeed, many of our message board data might be just of this sort. In these contexts, the initial reasons for associating the objective frame with positive face *do* apply.

Obviously, much work remains in articulating a positive account of the social and personal factors that guide speakers in their choices in framing a dispute (although it is not obvious that this work falls upon the philosopher of language rather than merely the sociolinguist herself). In this section, I take myself to have only hinted at one possible initial development of such an account—drawing upon, for illustrative purposes, an often-cited sociolinguistic framework for understanding and interpreting certain rhetorical strategies. In the next section, I likewise merely gesture towards the nature of the explanation of another loose end: why certain predicates occur disproportionately more often in “FD-Shaped” disputes.

so far it isn’t a piece of crap at all.” I would have been justifiably offended if he had stated instead, “You’re absolutely right; it *is* a piece of crap!”

3. The Disproportionate Use of Certain Types of Predicates in “FD-Shape”

I have argued that, due to the extra-semantic nature of the trope of feigned objectivity, no predicate is in principle immune from use in disputes that share the purportedly puzzling features of alleged faultless disputes about matters of taste (cf., especially, Chapter 3). (I take myself to have captured the most pressing, and commonly cited, of these semantic features through FD-Shape.)

I have *not*, however, provided an account of why certain predicates seem disproportionately more likely to occur in FD-Shaped disputes than others. We might ask why it is, for example, that predicates of personal taste and certain vague scalar predicates seem highly prone for use in such disputes—in *real-world* FD-Shaped disputes, if you will—while such disputes involving scientific predicates seem uncommon (individual counterexamples like ‘planet’ notwithstanding), and while our example of a dispute involving a mathematical predicate probably felt contrived (see Chapter 3, §4).

Of course, my account *does not* predict that all predicates should be equally likely to occur in FD-Shaped disputes. Indeed, on the contrary, the account predicts that (all else being equal) the phenomenon should occur at differing rates for different predicates *according to factors that promote an initial divergence in application conditions* and, moreover, *according to factors that cause feigning objectivity to be a rhetorically effective means of furthering conversational aims*. Due to the simple fact that the interests of speakers vary according to the topic of conversation, some predicates occur more often in conversational contexts in which feigned objectivity—or, for that matter, other

tropes—are *not* the optimal means to further conversational aims. (Stereotypical philosophical discussion, in which it is expected that disputants strip away surface language to reveal the underlying nature of their commitments, seems to be a case in point.) Some predicates, including predicates of personal taste, often appear in affectively-charged informal discussions of interpersonal differences, wherein the emphasis and intensity yielded by the objective frame can be highly apt.

We can make this discussion a bit more precise by recalling earlier points about the central factors that permit FD-Shape. In Chapter 3, §4, I identified the following two sufficient conditions:

- (i) There are two speakers, A and B, who use ‘F’ according to different standards of application (where it is not the case that A and B are disposed to defer to the same standard or authority with respect to the proper use of ‘F’);
- (ii) B has reason to call attention to the discrepancy between A and B’s standards for applying ‘F’ by inducing Contradiction Shape.

There, I argued that (i) and (ii) *can* be met for any predicate. What we should presently notice, though, is that these conditions are more likely actually to be met by some predicates than by others. In the remainder of this section, synthesizing observations raised throughout this dissertation, I will describe some reasons for which these differences in propensity for FD-Shape arise. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, they seem often to lead far afield of semantic and philosophy of language—directing the theorist instead to various outposts in the social and behavioral sciences. The explanation of actual differences in the occurrence of FD-Shape does not guide back to an explanation that privileges semantics; instead, in keeping with the rest of the dissertation, it incurs further

demand for a broad, multi-disciplinary approach to the study of the language of disputation.

Following the model of the argument in Chapter 3, I will take in turn factors that promote condition (i) and those that promote condition (ii).

3.1 Factors that Promote Faultlessness Analogue

Start with condition (i). Rephrased slightly, this condition tells that, for an FD-Shaped dispute to arise, there must be interpersonal divergence in speakers' application conditions for 'F' within the community of potential disputants, and it must *not* be that all speakers are disposed to defer to a common authority or standard with respect to the "proper" application conditions for 'F'.

We might first note that, in typical cases, the divergence occurs in part because the community of speakers has not adopted unanimously recognized standards for the application of 'F' (in particular, standards that governs all of its uses—including those in ordinary informal discourse). It should be obvious that, absent a collectively agreed-upon standard, speakers are more likely to differ with regard to whether or not 'F' should be applied in certain cases. At the same time, however, the lack of a common standard is neither necessary nor sufficient for the satisfaction of the first prerequisite of a predicate's use in an FD-Shaped dispute. It is *not necessary* due to at least two types of possibilities. First, even if speakers unanimously agree upon a common standard for 'F' in familiar contexts, the standard might not decide whether 'F' should be applied in every possible case, allowing the possibility that speakers will differ (and dispute) its

application in some novel context (cf. Wilson 2006 for more on this issue). Second, even if all speakers assent to a common standard at some initial time—even a common *determinate* standard—this does not preclude the possibility that, eventually, a speaker will decide to propose countervailing application conditions (cf. the “worst case scenario” discussed in Chapter 3, §4). The latter points figured crucially into the argument of Chapter 3; at present, however, we should acknowledge that counterexamples are presumably rare. The lack of a common standard or authority almost surely increases the chance that a given predicate will actually be used in an FD-Shape dispute.

It is presently important to stress, though, that the lack of a mutually-agreed upon standard of application is also *not sufficient* for (i). Noting this insufficiency can help us to identify additional factors that promote the occurrence of FD-Shape. One possibility that must be ruled out, for example, is that all individuals in a community of speakers are simply agnostic or indifferent about cases that fall outside of the agreed-upon standards for applying ‘F’. Imagine, for example, that all speakers grant that Pluto can be called a “planet” or not, that an appletini can be called a “martini” or not, and NIN can be called “industrial” or not—all of the being borderline cases whose classification would depend on choices turning on what conceptual scheme one adopts—and yet that no speaker is willing to commit to a more precise standard for applying ‘planet’, ‘martini’, or ‘industrial’ that would decide these cases. For their respective application conditions for ‘planet’, ‘martini’, and ‘industrial’ so on *to diverge*—and, thus, for *disputes* to result—at least some speakers must make decisive but conflicting judgements.

This directs us to another important factor that promotes a predicate’s actual use

in FD-Shaped disputes: the chances of the latter are increased when there is natural intersubjective variability in the concepts or properties that speakers track by their uses of the predicate. There are, in turn, many factors that promote such intersubjective variability—related to the psychology of speakers as well as the nature of the things that speakers use the predicate to denote—and I will provide only a few examples.

Consider, first, predicates that are used to express response-dependent properties. Suppose that speakers typically apply such predicates on the basis of their own responses—at least as a default or rule of thumb (more on this below). We would expect to see divergences in application conditions to the extent that speakers' relevant responses differ. Many speakers might roughly agree in their assessment of what is red or blue, for example, or what is sweet, salty, or bitter. But some speakers are colorblind, some have defects in their taste receptors, and some simply differ in the extent to which they have grown accustomed to sugary soft drinks, Vegemite, beer, or other sweet, salty, or bitter delicacies. Most likely, there is even greater natural interpersonal variability in certain affective responses, such as those that enter into common application conditions for predicates of personal taste.

We can extend this line of thought to *any* situation in which a speaker's assessment of a property depends in part on the perspective gained from that speaker's upbringing or current situation: for instance, adults who seem tall and old to children often don't seem tall or old to adults, and products that seem costly to a blue collar worker often don't seem so to Fortune 500 CEOs. Of course, due to factors outside of the semantics, not all perspective-dependent vague predicates admit of the same degree of

variability in application: if incomes are less homogenous than heights, for example, we'd expect there to be greater potential for differences in the application conditions of a predicate like 'rich' or 'expensive' than one like 'tall'.

Let's now shift to another sort of example: predicates for natural or artifactual kinds. In some cases, due to the nature of human psychology, speakers might instinctively carve up the world in similar ways. Perhaps, for instance, people are innately disposed to be essentialists about animals and other natural kinds, and maybe we intuitively co-classify artifacts on the basis of intended function (cf., e.g., Bloom 2000). This, no doubt, is controversial; however, assuming for illustrative purposes that it is true, we should expect (so-called) natural kind predicates and artifact terms to admit of less intersubjective variability in application conditions—and, therefore, a lower propensity for use in FD-Shaped disputes—than predicates whose application is more strongly influenced by subjective responses and perspective like 'fun', 'sweet', or 'rich'. But it is also crucial to recognize, however, that even if such an “essentialist” picture of human psychology is correct, there are often multiple possible “essences” for speakers to latch onto; the world does not always cooperate by being neatly carved into species or other natural or man-made kinds. Whether Pluto is a planet, for instance, depends on what we take the “essence” of planet-hood to be, whether archaeopteryx is a bird depends on what we take the “essence” of bird-hood to be, and whether an appletini is a martini—we might say—depends on what we take the “essence” of martini-hood to be. In these and other cases, divergence in applications conditions might occur if it turns out that speakers have implicitly attuned to different candidate “essences” or unifying characteristics of

instances of a purported “kind.”

An initial divergence in application conditions—and, hence, condition (i) above—is clearly encouraged if speakers naturally track different properties or concepts by their usages of a predicate ‘F’. The central point is that in these cases, even in the absence of collective agreement on standards for applying ‘F’, individual speakers might employ criteria for applying ‘F’ that are more fine-grained and precise than any that are in commonly agreed upon. But note, importantly, that this is still not sufficient for the sort of robust difference in application conditions that lay behind Faultlessness Analogue. The problem is this: even if speakers *initially* or *instinctively* track different concepts by their applications of some term ‘F’, they might be disposed to allow other speakers to “correct” their use of ‘F’.

Alleged natural-kind predicates provide canonical examples here: suppose that a child initially comes to apply ‘fish’ according to the condition “Apply ‘fish’ to x iff x is an animal and x has a fish-like shape” (where to have a “fish-like shape” is simply to have a shape similar to one of the animals that the child recognizes as a paradigmatic fish—or, perhaps, one that resembles a cracker or chewy snack food that a child is told to be fish-shaped). If this child and an educated adult were to encounter a whale, they would differ in their initial judgements with respect to the application of ‘fish’ to the whale. The child, however, is most likely disposed to defer to the adult upon correction. In a similar vein, colorblind individuals might defer to the normally sighted with respect to the proper application of color terms, and individuals missing certain taste receptors might defer to normally-tasting individuals with respect to the proper use of ‘sweet’, ‘salty’, or ‘bitter’.

Indeed, for that matter, many speakers might defer to sommeliers for the “proper” application of ‘delicious’ to wines (cf. Railton’s interpretation of such disputes, as presented in Chapter 1, §3).

Thus, in our discussion of factors that promote condition (i) and in turn FD-Shape, a final important point is that FD-Shape requires that speakers not only differ in their initial intuitive dispositions for apply predicate but also, when these intuitive uses are called into question, defer to different authorities or else do not defer at all. Such fractured deference patterns might obtain for many reasons; individual speakers might simply be stubborn, for instance, or competing experts might find themselves unable to agree upon common application conditions for ‘F’. But one important general point is that, often, there is no pressing need to establish a commonly agreed upon standard—and, indeed, given speakers’ interests in applying the predicate, it might be more beneficial to speakers to cultivate distinct conditions of application. Considerations on these lines have already been broached and discussed in establishing the empirical insufficiency of the negotiation view.

Whether or not the latter is true of a given predicate turns on not only what the predicate means but also, and more importantly, what interests and benefits those speakers who discuss its denotata; thus, the story we must tell in predicting seems to be one for anthropology, sociology, or social psychology more than semantics or philosophy of language.

3.2 Factors that Promote Faultlessness Analogue

Let's now turn our attention to (ii); to predict the occurrence of an FD-Shaped dispute, it is essential also to factors that increase the chance that a second speaker, who applies 'F' according to application conditions that diverge from those of an initial speaker, will instigate a "Contradiction-Shaped" dispute.

In Chapter 4, extending the conclusions regarding predicates of personal taste that I presented in Chapter 2, I argued that the respondent in many stereotypical FD-Shaped disputes says what he does in order to call attention to the discrepancy between his own standards for applying 'F' and those of the initial speaker—and that, furthermore, he does *this* as an implicit expression of his own values or identity and, perhaps, as a means to emphasize his distinction from the initial speaker and those like her, or to discredit the values and perspective that underlie the initial speaker's predicative judgement. There is no need to review this argument, nor is there need to recapitulate the discussion of the variety of implicit evaluations that might be expressed in an FD-Shaped dispute and the additional variety of the reasons for which speakers might desire to express such evaluations. When it comes to predicting the occurrence of a given predicate in an FD-Shaped dispute, the relevant conclusion is simply this: we must ask (again) what the predicate means and, second, the extent to which this meaning is value-laden for speakers (in any of the many ways overviewed in Chapter 4): what are speakers talking about by use of the predicate, and how does this enter into webs of self- and social identities and valuations?

I have argued that, by feigning objectivity, the respondent in an FD-Shape represents his own standards as superior and, in essence, denies the legitimacy of the

initial speaker's standards for applying 'F'. Such a response should become more probable as 'F' (or, perhaps, the standards for applying 'F') becomes more value-laden in any of a number of ways—where, for example, 'F' is a predicate that is applied on the basis of valenced attitudes (e.g., on many common uses, predicates of personal taste), 'F' denotes a property that many speakers in the community tend to value or disvalue (e.g. 'old', 'fat', 'progressive', 'industrial', etc.), the considerations that guide speakers in adopting one or another precisification of are 'F' judged by others as better or worse considerations to hold in view when classifying objects (cf. the discussion in Chapter 4, §4), or even 'F' is merely ambiguous across dialects—and speakers from certain communities disesteem individuals from communities that happen to possess different the dialect in question (cf. the 'biscuit' example presented at the end of Chapter 3).

Furthermore, 'F' is likely to be more prone for occurrence of FD-Shaped disputes if it commonly used in conversational contexts in which expressions of valuing (including ventilatives, teases, etc.) would not amount to unacceptable sidetracks from more important conversational goals. I take that small talk settings commonly present such contexts—while scientific and philosophical disputes perhaps do *not*. The previous factors must, further, be married to the best sociolinguistic account of the adoption of the objective frame (cf. §2).

Finally, we should point out that, given that the objective frame is also (if not always!) used in the service of negotiating common application conditions, the aim to coordinate meaning can give a speaker additional reason to reply in a way that induces Contradiction Shape—and thus, if 'F' is a predicate for which some speakers have such

coordinative goals, ‘F’ might be (*ceteris paribus*) more prone to use in FD-Shaped disputes than a predicate whose meaning speakers have no desire to coordinate. (We should additionally note, though, that this factor—while conducive to the second prerequisite on an FD-Shaped dispute—may be antagonistic to the first: the demand to converge on common standards might prevent the persistent proliferation of application conditions that is typically reflected in FD-Shaped disputes.)

3.3 Why Taste Predicates Are More “FD-Prone” than Mathematical Predicates

In light of §3.1-2, we might revisit the favorite types of predicates used to motivate faultless disagreement and, on the flip side, predicates that few philosophers would deem analogous to these predicates with respect to this phenomenon.

First of all, predicates of personal taste like ‘fun’ and ‘tasty’ (or ‘funny’, ‘sexy’, ‘disgusting’, etc.) are a near best-case scenario for use in FD-Shaped disputes.

Individuals’ tastes and preferences are naturally variable. Furthermore, it seems correct that—on at least some uses of these terms—speakers apply the predicate just in case they themselves experience a certain affective response to the object under scrutiny (or, say, recognize themselves as disposed to experience such a response, in favorable circumstances, to objects of a given kind). A consequence of these two facts is that speakers’ application conditions for predicates of personal taste are naturally variable. Furthermore, in many common uses of predicates of personal taste, there is little or no deference (cf. the coda to Chapter 2). Similarly, there is little or no pressure for speakers to adopt common standards for applying predicates of personal taste like ‘fun’ and

‘disgusting’—such as the responses experienced by certain educated or experienced individuals, or by the statistical majority of individuals, or by the healthiest individuals, or what have you. This might be due to our typical interests in using such predicates: we do often want to express our own affective responses and experiences of certain objects. In any case, these facts further support robust interpersonal differences in application conditions. Additionally, these divergent application conditions for predicates of personal taste (i.e. divergent preferences or tastes/standards of taste) often signal differences between speakers that are considered worthy of attention and highly value-laden. Moreover, personal taste is a (relatively) “safe” topic—and one about which nearly all speakers have opinions—making it a favored candidate for small-talk settings, in addition to a favored candidate for light-hearted teasing of acquaintances. (See Chapter 2 and §2 above for more detail on many of these points.) All of these factors increase the likelihood of FD-Shape.

At the other end of the spectrum, though, return to the case of mathematical predicates. Now, given most ordinary speakers’ interest in mathematics (or lack thereof)—as well as, perhaps, their intimidation and their esteem—most speakers readily defer to mathematicians for the meaning of mathematical terms. Furthermore, unlike taste (or even the classification of foods or music artists), mathematical topics and terminology are simply not things that—for most of us—unites social groups or forms a large component of one’s self-concept or individuality. Mathematical objects lack even the cultural significance of the planets—let alone of the whales and (other) fishes encountered by seafarers. Thus, it *does* feel contrived to envision a situation in which lay

speakers rise in protest of some reclassification within mathematics—or otherwise instigate an FD-Shaped dispute over some mathematical term—but this, I believe, says as much or more about the social and cultural status of mathematics than it says about the semantics of mathematical terms.

Perhaps, between these two endpoints, the propensity for FD-Shape *does* tend to co-vary with the presence or absence of certain semantic properties such as evaluativity and vagueness—but covariance, of course, is no causal or explanatory link. A deep explanation for differences in the occurrences of such disputes demands inquiry into numerous social and psychological attributes of speakers and their communities and sub-cultures. Given what I have previously said about the rich and varied communicative roles of feigning objectivity, this should come as little surprise.

Appendix A: On Epistemic Modal Sentences

Philosophers have sometimes claimed that the discourses of taste and epistemic modality both permit “faultless disagreement,” this in turn has sometimes been thought to provide evidence in favor of the adoption of parallel semantic accounts for both epistemic modals and ascriptions of predicates of personal taste (such as relativism or sophisticated versions of contextualism).⁸⁶ It seems that, insofar as philosophers have been interested in both discourses, it has been custom to advance semantic proposals that can at once accommodate the disagreement data spawned by each. In contrast, few theorists have emphasized the disanalogies between the two discourses—or even presented clearly different accounts of “faultless disagreement” in the two cases.

On the surface, though, it is not at all obvious that ascriptions of predicates of personal taste are close semantic kin to epistemic modals. I believe that even alleged cases of “faultless disagreement” are importantly different between the two discourses—different in ways that entail that the disagreement data do not require a homogenous semantic (or pragmatic) solution. Thus, I believe, it is no shortcoming of my account of faultless disagreement in taste discourse that it fails to generalize to epistemic modals. I

⁸⁶ MacFarlane (2014) provides parallel relativistic treatments of both discourses. Egan (2007, 2010) adopts the view that, in both cases, speakers express *de se* propositions. Schaffer (2011) defends a flexible contextualist account of the both types of sentences.

address these issues, and pose some tentative considerations concerning epistemic modals, in this appendix.

1. Faultless Disagreement in Matters of Taste and Epistemic Modality

In this section, after summarizing my earlier conclusions concerning disputes about matters of taste, I begin by describing the salient ways in which disputes involving epistemic modals are disanalogous. From this point, I look more closely at what *does* appear semantically problematic about the latter disputes—conjecturing that, at base, the problem is simply that the assertibility conditions of epistemic modal sentences seem permissive in a way that is difficult to reconcile with the conditions under which another’s assertion of an epistemic modal sentence can be felicitously denied.

In Chapter 1, I suggested the following as the core relevant sense of “faultlessness” in stereotypical objectively-framed taste disputes: both the initial speaker A and the second speaker B appear to be disposed to assent to their respective taste claims regardless of any information available to them (cf. Faultlessness Analogue)—and this, moreover, does not seem to be due to any rational flaw (cf. Competence Constraint). Then, in Chapter 2, I proposed the following explanation: even though A and B are both robustly committed to their respective taste claims, and neither is necessarily “objectively wrong” (or otherwise “at fault”), one of B’s conversational aims is to express a *value judgement* (perhaps strongly and emphatically) that contrasts with a value judgement of A. B’s denial of A’s utterance serves this latter aim: it lends emphasis and intensity by framing the dispute between A and B *as if* it were a dispute about an objective fact—

since, in doing so, B implicitly frames A as ignorant, incompetent, or otherwise mistaken. As I described it in Chapter 2, this is a rhetorical strategy roughly on par with casting another speaker as “crazy” or “stupid” for failing to share one’s tastes, preferences, values, or interests. This explanation does not require that A and B “literally disagree” about any shared propositional content of their respective taste claims. Indeed, what is crucial in all of the “faultless” disputes that I have discussed in this dissertation is that the difference between A and B’s conditions for applying ‘F’ reflects differences between A and B’s values, interests, or perspectives—and that B desires to impugn A’s values, interests, or perspectives, or at least make clear to listeners that B does not share them. When B rejects an application of ‘F’ that reveals these underlying differences—feigning contradiction and objectivity—B implicitly disavows A’s classificatory scheme and the values and other personal or socio-cultural factors that underlie it.

Now, as stressed in Chapters 2 and 4, I think that the account of “feigning objectivity” as a trope should strike most speakers as immediately plausible when applied to objectively-framed taste disputes and many stereotypical merely verbal disputes. There are two main reasons for this. First, in the disputes discussed, most speakers readily admit that there is no real “factual” matter at issue. I emphasized in Chapter 2 that, according to the prevalent folk theory, matters of taste are *not* objective. Furthermore, lay speakers as well as theorists often intuit that disputes like those discussed in Chapter 4 are *just* arguments about whether to apply a certain label to a particular case. Second, both taste disputes and merely verbal disputes are often affectively charged—and the role of value differences is obvious to participants as well as observers (at least those with the relevant

knowledge about the social and cultural norms and trends in which the respective disputants are embedded).

It should be clear, in contrast, that the above account does not translate smoothly (if at all) to stereotypical disputes involving epistemic modals—for at least the following two reasons:

1. The precisification of the “faultlessness” explanandum (i.e. Faultlessness Analogue) does not apply.
2. The account of “feigning objectivity” should at least seem suspect.

First, the above elucidation of “faultlessness” is inaccurate in most cases of disputes involving epistemic modals—for most of these disputes arise precisely because one speaker initially lacks relevant information. Consider a scenario in which A says “It might be that *p*” and B says “It cannot be that *p*.” Suppose, say, that Alex asserts “Jones might be in her office,” while Billy denies this. Now, on the one hand, it could be that Billy has information that Alex lacks—information that rules out the possibility that Jones is in her office. Perhaps, say, Jones has told Billy that she would be out of the country for the week. If Alex were to come into possession of this additional information, then Alex would presumably come to agree with Billy that Jones cannot be in her office. If this is so, it would *not* seem that Alex would be disposed to assert “Jones might be in her office” regardless of the available information. On the other hand, it could be that Alex has information that Billy lacks; perhaps, say, Alex knows that Jones does not wish to be disturbed by Billy and that therefore Jones lied to Billy about her leaving the country. In this case, we would expect that *Billy* would not continue to stand by his

claim—that Jones cannot be in her office—regardless of the evidence available to Billy. If Billy were to find out that Jones had attempted to deceive him, then Billy might lose his sole basis for believing that Jones cannot be in her office—and would thus come to agree with Alex that she might be in her office after all. In either of these cases, we intuit that one speaker—Alex or Billy—would give up his initial claim after the two speakers pool their evidence. This contrasts starkly with what occurs in stereotypical disputes about matters of taste—in which it seems two speakers can *possess all the same evidence* but still disagree about whether Vegemite is tasty, roller coasters are fun, or the like.

Second, it would seem suspect—to say the least—to hypothesize that the “objective frame” employed in epistemic modal discourse is merely a trope that lends rhetorical force. Many speakers have the pre-philosophical intuition that the speakers do not really argue about “objective matters of fact” in stereotypical disputes about taste or merely verbal disputes—but, in contrast, it is not at all clear that speakers have such intuitions about disputes over epistemic modal claims. Certainly, speakers lack such intuitions about the wider disputes in which these exchanges are embedded. Take our fictional dispute between Alex and Billy about whether Jones might be in her office. We would not expect an onlooker to interject, say, “That’s just your opinion,” “To each his own,” or “There’s no disputing epistemic modality.” Furthermore, while the influence of value is often pronounced in taste disputes and many merely verbal disputes, this is not true of many—perhaps most—disputes involving epistemic modals. When Alex and Billy debate whether or not Jones might be in her office, it seems that they *are* attempting to figure out whether a certain proposition (viz. the proposition that Jones is in her office)

is true, false, or at least a live option.

I believe that these two major differences are complimentary. In canonical taste disputes and merely verbal disputes, the tension between the speakers arises due to a robust discrepancy between the conditions under which they are disposed to apply a certain predicate; this discrepancy marks a value-laden difference in values, interests, or perspectives. This is where “feigning objectivity” plays its role. In contrast, in canonical cases of disputes involving epistemic modals, there is no robust discrepancy between the speakers’ uses of a certain predicate; correspondingly, the discrepancy in judgement apparently reflects no deep difference in conditions for applying a predicate that can itself pose a target for evaluation. Given the difference in the nature of the apparent problem, it should not be surprising to find that the precise solution that I have offered in the case of disputes about taste does not apply to epistemic modal discourse. If “feigning objectivity” has any role to play in disputes involving epistemic modals, its function appears to differ from the analysis given so far. Before embarking on this path, though, it is necessary to develop a better sense of what *is* peculiar about disputes involving epistemic modals—since, so far, we have only considered what “faultless disagreement” in disputes involving epistemic modals does *not* appear to be.

For orientation, consider the following stereotypical example: Neither Dick nor Jane knows the location of their TV remote. Dick has not yet checked the coffee table drawer. Unbeknownst to him, however, Jane retrieved a coaster from this drawer a few minutes ago (while Dick was in the kitchen), whereupon she noticed the drawer to be empty except for the coasters and a few magazines.

- (31) (a) Dick: “The remote might be in the coffee table drawer.”
(b) Jane: “No, it can’t be in the drawer; the drawer is nearly empty.”
(c) Dick: “OK. So it can’t be in the drawer. Where else could it be then?”

An exchange like (31) involves no infelicities or apparent “fault.” Dick is justified in his assertion in (31.a): he has not looked in the drawer himself, and he does not realize that Jane had just opened the drawer; thus, for all he knows at the time, the remote might very well be in the drawer. Meanwhile, Jane knows that the remote is *not* in the drawer—and, given this, her reply in (31.b) seems perfectly appropriate. Lastly, since Dick takes Jane at her word, his expressed agreement with her in (31.c)—and, with it, his retraction of (31.a)—does not seem at all odd or incorrect.

We should ask, then, in what sense the initial disagreement between Dick and Jane—as expressed in (31.a) and (31.b)—might be said to appear “faultless.” I have already pointed out that the precisification of “faultlessness” as empirical robustness does not generally apply in disputes about epistemic modals, in which disagreement exists initially precisely because one speaker is in a weaker evidential situation than the other. We can see this in our present case: Dick’s assertion in (31.a) is not empirically robust; he accepts the evidence provided by Jane in (31.b) and thereupon denies this initial assertion in (31.c). But we saw in Chapter 1 that other possible precisifications of the notion of “faultlessness,” such as justification on the basis on one’s present evidence, lack interesting ramifications for semantics in themselves—so, although the exchange in (31) might be “faultless” in such a weaker sense, this does not explain why such data have motivated views like relativism.

By way of contrast, consider (32)—which is also arguably “faultless” in this weak sense. To set the stage, assume that Dick places the remote in the coffee table drawer, and then briefly leaves the living room. While he is gone, Sally enters the room and—unbeknownst to Dick—takes the remote from the coffee table drawer, flips through the TV channels, and finally returns the remote to the end table drawer. Sally then leaves, and (while Dick is still away) Jane enters and happens to notice the remote in the end table drawer. Dick finally returns, his hands full. The following exchange ensues:

- (32) (a) Dick: “Can you turn the TV on?”
Sees Jane reach for end table drawer.
 “Oh, the remote is in the coffee table drawer.”
- (b) Jane: “No, it’s not; it’s in this one.”
Removes the remote.
- (c) Dick: “OK. It wasn’t in the coffee table drawer; someone must have moved it.”

In (32.a), as in (31.a), Dick seems to be justified in his assertion: given his evidence, it is reasonable for him to believe that the remote is in the drawer. It is clear, though, that Dick simply speaks falsely in (32.a). Licensed assertion does not entail truth, and the fact that one might come to reject something that one was previously licensed to assert is no peculiarity in itself. So, if not empirical robustness, what causes the exchange in (31) to seem to pose problems for semantics that are not presented by (32)? More precisely: why shouldn’t we suppose that Dick also simply speaks falsely in (31.a)?

Although I will not pursue this question in depth in this Appendix, my hunch is that the basic problem is this: speakers often seem licensed to assert epistemic modal sentences on the basis of only that body of evidence larger than that possessed by the

speaker at the time of utterance—and yet, at the same time, there seem to be no principled bounds on which speakers can *deny* an utterance of an epistemic modal. This problem can be illustrated by considering potential candidates for the truth conditions of epistemic modal sentences. Suppose, at a first pass, that an occurrence of a sentence of the form “It might be that p ” is true just in case p is compatible with the evidence possessed by X , for some individual or group X . We must then figure out how a value is assigned to X upon a given utterance of a sentence of the form “It might be that p .”

We might start by noting that—barring some qualifications to be discussed later—it seems that a speaker S is licensed to assert “It might be that p ” at t just in case p is compatible with S ’s own evidence at t . To this observation—that S is typically licensed to assert “It might be that p ” at t just in case p is compatible with S ’s evidence at t —we should add that, generally speaking, a speaker S is licensed to assert any sentence at t only if (roughly) the truth of that the sentence follows from S ’s evidence at t . From the latter more general conditions on assertion, it follows that S is licensed to assert “It might be that p ” only if it follows from S ’s evidence at the time of the assertion that “It might be that p ” is true—or, in other words, only if it follows from S ’s evidence that p is compatible with S ’s evidence at t (assuming for now that this is the correct analysis). Of course, if S recognizes that p is compatible with S ’s evidence, then (trivially) S does have good evidence that p is compatible with S ’s evidence; thus, the condition on assertion is easily fulfilled.

If this is case, though, the theorist encounters difficulty—allegedly—in accommodating the felicity of denial: it is felicitous for speakers, such as Jane in (31.b),

to deny epistemic modal claims uttered by other speakers *even if* they recognize that the initial speaker says what it is correct for him to say given his evidence. In (31), for instance, Jane presumably doesn't deny that it was compatible with *Dick's* evidence that the remote was in the drawer. Moreover, even if she *does*, it should seem strange that Dick would proceed to agree with her—rather than protesting that it *was* true that, for all he knew, the remote could have been in the drawer. But (31) does not seem peculiar.

No doubt this oversimplifies the conventions surrounding appropriate use of epistemic modal claims. For one, a speaker *S* is not *always* licensed to assert “It might be that *p*” if *p* is compatible with her evidence. Note, on this front, that sentences of the form “I don't know whether it might be that *p*” are often felicitous (e.g. “I don't know whether I might have heart disease; I haven't talked to my doctor about this at all”). Likewise, speakers might ask others “Might it be that *p*?” (e.g. “Might it be, doctor, that I have heart disease?”). These are not questions about what is not ruled out by *the speaker's* evidence—but about what is not ruled out by the evidence of *the addressee*. In such cases, a speaker refuses even to make a claim about *what's possible*—presumably because she realizes that she has epistemic superiors who are better placed to answer the question. Apparently, then, license to assert “It might be that *p*” is not as easily acquired as the first-pass analysis above has suggested.

As has often been discussed in the literature, an obvious move for the theorist to make it to adjust the proposed truth conditions for utterances of epistemic modal sentences. The problem, often noted, is that it is difficult—if not impossible—to find the requisite happy medium. The larger the relevant group, the less often speakers could ever

be in a position to have good enough evidence to assert such a sentence; the smaller the relevant group, the more often speakers should demur from denying the epistemic modal claims of speakers in weaker epistemic positions. The core intuition behind “faultlessness” in disputes involving epistemic modals cannot be robustness against *further* evidence; instead, it seems, it is something like (initial) assertibility *in the face of highly limited evidence*. And, as in the other disputes that we have considered, this is difficult to reconcile with what we might still described as “Contradiction Shape” and “Disagreement Analogue” (cf. Chapter 1).

2. Subjectivity, Objectivity, Feigned Objectivity, and Epistemic Modals

I will not presently develop an account of the semantics, pragmatics, or sociolinguistics of epistemic modal sentences. I will, however, briefly consider an approach that we might take in developing an account of the roles of subjective and objective framing in this domain of discourse. Although we have seen that the problems raised by *disagreement data* take a different form where epistemic modal sentences are concerned, I believe that—at a broad level—many of the same socio-pragmatic considerations surrounding the use of the “objective frame” apply in this domain as well.

In light of the problem raised at the end of §1, it seems appropriate to take a cue from one of the main conclusions of this dissertation and question the assumption that the denial data demand sameness of truth-conditional content between the utterance of the denier and the utterance being denied. As discussed in Chapter 4, this assumption has been independently questioned by other philosophers—especially proponents of the

negotiation view such as Sundell (2011) and Plunkett and Sundell (2013a, b)—who make no claim that the only alternative use of denial is as a trope. (On their view, to recall, denial is felicitous in contexts in which A says ‘*a* is F’, B says ‘*a* is not F’, A and B mean different things by ‘F’, but A and B attempt to negotiate a common meaning of ‘F’.) Thus, although it does not appear that the second speaker in a dispute involving epistemic modals intends to issue an implicit evaluation, there might be other reasons for which it is efficacious to employ an “objective frame.”

Therefore, rather than search for the shared propositional content of utterances of epistemic modal sentences in exchanges like (31), I propose a different strategy: analyze what speakers use epistemic modal sentences *to do*—and then ask how the use of the objective frame, versus the also-available subjective frame, helps speakers do this. With this in mind, what *do* speakers aim to accomplish in those contexts in which they are likely to use—and dispute—sentences of the form “It might be that *p*”? Surely, there is no one answer—but, in general, it is an important point is that such speakers are typically *not* primarily interested in whether it is true or false that *p* is consistent with some fixed body of evidence (like, say, the evidence possessed by the speaker or even the pooled evidence of the conversational participants). Typically, insofar as speakers *are* interested in whether *p* is consistent with some specific body of evidence it is only *en route* to figuring out whether *p itself* is true or false (or, if this cannot be determined, at least whether *p* is a possibility that they should factor into their plans and deliberations⁸⁷). In

⁸⁷ In some cases, speakers might need to determine whether *p* demands further investigation before being ruled out (e.g. “The patient might have cancer; we need to

other words, if the previous hypothesis concerning the truth-conditions of epistemic modal sentences is correct, it seems that when speakers debate the truth of “It might be that p ” they are—more likely than not—more interested in figuring out whether the prejacent p is true or false than whether “It might be that p ” is true or false.

Now, when speakers engage in deliberation about the truth, falsity, or probability of some proposition p , they base their conclusions on the evidence available to them in their present conversational context—but this, of course, is due to necessity. Typically, such speakers would be receptive to relevant information introduced by a newly recruited conversational participant, divulged by an eavesdropper, or otherwise discovered during the course of the conversation. Likewise, most speakers who deliberate about whether or not “it might be that p ” would be receptive to any evidence that bears on the truth of p —regardless of whether its source is a conversational participant or some distant and unrelated third party. Given their ultimate interest in determining whether p is true or false, there seem to be no principled bounds on *whose* information is of interest. Again, although such speakers arguably *are* interested in the truth of propositions like p *is compatible with what is known by X* , they are interested in such facts as stepping stones to discovering the truth about p itself.

conduct more tests,” “Iraq might have weapons of mass destruction; we need to carry out espionage,” or “The remote control might be in the coffee table drawer; we need to look”)—or they might need to know whether p is possible for the purpose of planning other actions. If p is a significant enough risk, speakers might be willing to act *as if* p is true—even if p has a fairly low probability (e.g. “You might have terminal cancer; make sure that your will is up-to-date,” “Iraq might have weapons of mass destruction; we need to wage war against Iraq,” or “The remote control might be in the coffee table drawer; we need to put out the fire before it destroys the coffee table”).

Importantly, the considerations raised above do not entail that a given utterance of “It might be that p ” *doesn’t* express the proposition that p is compatible with what is known by X for some fixed individual or group X . Here, it is useful to observe that speakers can pursue the same conversational goals—figuring out whether p is true or false, or at least whether p can be ruled out—by the use of *explicitly subjective* epistemic modal sentences, such as those tagged by “for all I know” or “as far as I know.” One way in which speakers attempt to inform addressees that a proposition p is true, or should at least be kept in mind as a live possibility, is to use sentences that literally express propositions *about a speaker’s present epistemic state regarding p* . Uses of “I believe that p ” and “I think that p ” are perhaps the most obvious examples. Typically, a speaker who utters such a sentence wants the hearer to come to believe p (for the hearer’s benefit)—or perhaps to either confirm or disconfirm p (for the speaker’s benefit)—not *simply* to come to believe that *the speaker believes that p is true*.

Such a speaker might have one of a number of social pragmatic reasons to assert “I believe that p ” rather than “ p .” She might wish to convey epistemic modesty or deference to her interlocutors. If she is not fully certain that p is true, she might want to commit to something weaker—as insurance against the case that p turns out to be false. Similarly, a speaker might say “For all it know, it might be that p ” even when that speaker’s goal is to suggest to the addressee *that p might be true*—not merely that p is compatible with what the speaker knows. Once again, speakers commonly use such sentences as a way to offer p for consideration (whether as the truth, or simply a possibility that should be kept in mind)—even though concerns for modesty, deference,

or lack of commitment might encourage the adoption of the “subjective frame” as a hedge.

We might also note that, in such uses of attitude ascriptions, epistemic modal claims, and other constructions, it is not essential that speakers reference *their own* epistemic states. Note, for instance, that the following sentences might also be used as a way to get the address to accept *that p*: “X thinks that *p*” (for some other individual or group X), “Some people say that *p*,” “For all they’ve told us, *p*,” or “It has been said that *p*.” This also seem to be a technique to distance the speaker from responsibility—or to convey epistemic inferiority or modesty.⁸⁸

I propose that we approach “bare” epistemic modals from a similar vantage point: it is clear that speakers could use such sentences to convey information about the *possibility of p*, full stop, even if they express subjective or perspectival propositions. But there are still significant conversational differences between the use of “It might be that *p*” instead of, on the one hand “*p*” or, on the other hand, (for example) “For all I know, it might be that *p*.” And, like the difference between objectively and subjectively framed taste claims, these differences largely revolve around the speaker’s choice to either position herself as a relatively authority or express deference and modesty.

Of course, a speaker who asserts “It might be that *p*” commits to something much weaker than he would have by simply asserting “*p*.” Typically, in asserting “It might be

⁸⁸ Although safer in once sense—in absolving the speaker from direct commitment to *p*—these constructions do commit the speaker to the truth of propositions about what other parties say or believe; if this is inaccurate, the speaker might be to blame. This is not a risk when the speaker reports *her own* beliefs.

that *p*” a speaker wants his addressee to come to believe that *p* is *not ruled out*. The speaker himself might not believe that *p* is *true*, only that *p* is a live possibility. But it could be, of course, that the speaker *does* believe that *p* is true—but that he does not want to *commit* to this in front of his audience. There are many reasons why such a speaker might nonetheless opt for this more tentative assertion. He might not want to appear too bold in front of those who should be—or whom he otherwise wishes to treat as—his epistemic peers or even superiors (and who yet seem unaware that *p* is true). Or he might not be entirely certain of *p* and simply not want to take the blame—or to appear stupid—if *p* turns out to be false.

At the same time, however, the speaker who asserts “It might be that *p*” commits to something *stronger* than he would have by asserting “For all I know, it might be that *p*” or “I think that it might be that *p*” (or, for that matter, “My mother said that it might be that *p*”). A tentative suggestion is that the use of the objective frame presupposes that all parties to the investigation have the same body of information and implicates that the speaker is in an epistemic position that is at least as good as those of her interlocutors; that is, the un-hedged, unrelativized construction suggests that the speaker’s current state of knowledge is *no worse than* the state of knowledge of his addressees. (Conversely, when a speaker adopts the subjective frame, she might indicate that her epistemic state *is* worse.)

I will not develop these ideas here. The moral is simply that, although in some ways strikingly disanalogous to disputes about matters of taste (and so on), disputes involving epistemic modals should also be approached more cautiously and yet also more

creatively than has often been the case; specifically, as in the other cases I have analyzed, theorists should not immediately “semanticize” the problem and—noting the felicity of denial—look for shared truth-conditions. Denial, as we have seen, has conversationally appropriate uses beyond the expression of “literal” contradiction. Furthermore, speakers choose to frame sentences as they do for many reasons—including social posturing and politeness—that exceed merely attempting to convey factual information clearly and straightforwardly.

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