

# Between Use Sensitive and Assessment Sensitive Truth

A Criticism of Truth Relativism

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis compares truth relativism with non-indexical contextualism. These views are compared both as general approaches to account for the use of a linguistic expression in declarative sentences and as proposals about particular expressions such as personal taste, aesthetic and moral predicates, epistemic modals, knowledge ascriptions and future contingents. Four aims are set forth: (i) to show that truth relativism must be understood as an account of the assessment sensitivity of our ordinary monadic truth notion, (ii) to single out a problem this view faces to make sense of its non-monadic truth notion and identify the best strategy to solve it, (iii) to argue that, with the exception of future contingents, this strategy cannot be applied to the cases for which truth relativist accounts have been proposed, and (iv) to argue for non-indexical contextualist treatments of these cases. The thesis has two parts; (i) and (ii) are addressed in the first one, while (iii) and (iv) are addressed in the second one. In addressing (iv), we only question the evidence adduced for truth relativism that non-indexical contextualism is committed to reject. As it happens, this is the evidence that is necessary to challenge in order to accommodate the problem mentioned in point (ii).

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## 1

**Introduction**

This dissertation compares truth relativism with non-indexical contextualism. These views are compared both as general approaches to account for the use of a linguistic expression in declarative sentences and as proposals about particular expressions such as personal taste, aesthetic and moral predicates, epistemic modals, knowledge ascriptions and future contingents.<sup>1</sup> As is natural, the attention shall be focused on the former approach, since it is the one that is more challenging and that has received most of the attention in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Two other approaches (i.e. indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism) with some of their variants shall be considered as well, since it proves necessary to do so in order to understand the arguments adduced in support of truth relativism. We, thus, leave expressivist views aside, and only mention in the final remarks some issues concerning contemporary expressivism that this dissertation leaves open.

We have four aims: (i) to show that truth relativism must be understood as an account of the assessment sensitivity of our ordinary monadic truth notion, (ii) to single out a problem faced by this view in making sense of its non-monadic truth notion and identify the best strategy to solve it,<sup>3</sup> (iii) to argue that, with the exception of future contingents, this strategy cannot be applied to the cases for which truth relativist accounts have been proposed, and (iv) to argue for non-indexical contextualist treatments of these cases. The dissertation has two parts; (i) and (ii) are addressed in the first one, while (iii) and (iv) are addressed in the second one. In

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of knowledge ascriptions this expression is “know(s),” whereas in the case of future contingents it can be any future tense marker. To be sure, we could take a whole declarative sentence as the expression deserving a given semantic treatment.

<sup>2</sup> Not many non-indexical contextualist views about the expressions here considered have been explicitly defended. Arguably, François Recanati (2007) advances such a view on some of these expressions, whereas Nikola Kompa (2002) defends it with respect to knowledge ascriptions.

<sup>3</sup> This problem might resemble but should not be confused with the classic self-refutation charge to global forms of truth relativism found in Plato’s (1997, 171-181) *Theaetetus*. According to this criticism, if the truth of everything is relative to, say, a perspective, the truth of truth relativism is itself relative. But then the view would be self-refuting, since its truth implies that it can be, from a perspective, correctly judged as false. Contemporary truth relativist views are only about sentences containing certain expressions, and so they are not subject to this classical charge.

addressing (iv) we shall only question the evidence adduced for truth relativism that non-indexical contextualism is committed to reject. As it happens, this is the evidence that is necessary to challenge in order to accommodate the problem mentioned in point (ii).

In distinguishing truth relativism from non-indexical contextualism we are taking a particular stance on how the former should be characterized and, consequently, on which considerations are ultimately relevant for assessing its merits and demerits. As we shall see, we understand truth relativism as a view that relativizes the truth, or better –using John MacFarlane’s (2007, 2014) terminology– the accuracy of assertions and belief tokens having certain contents to *perspectives* or *contexts of assessment*. Whereas both truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism treat truth as relative to a perspective or something more specific (e.g. an information state to deal with epistemic modals or a standard of taste to deal with predicates of personal taste), only the former considers that the accuracy of a range of assertions and belief tokens can vary with the assessor. Arguably, only if we understand truth relativism in the above stated way the proposal turns out to be challenging and intuitively related to what is pre-theoretically seen as a truth relativist view. It is standard usage to relativize truth to possible worlds and not unusual to relativize it to times, but the resulting views are not seen as forms of relativism in any special sense. Moreover, there may be no principled reason to think that some significant line is crossed when, in order to account for the use of different kinds of expressions, we relativize truth to some further parametric values like taste standards, knowledge standards, information states or even, if one is after some more encompassing notion, perspectives. A far more novel view is achieved if we, in addition, hold that the accuracy of assertions and belief tokens is relative to the assessor.

In the second and third chapters I shall argue that the proper way for a relativist to conceive of accuracy is as a notion that derives from a truth notion that is non-technical and assessment sensitive (i.e. a notion whose extension is sensitive to the context of assessment). As a result of this conclusion, the difference between truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism about an expression turns out to be a difference between taking the propositions expressed by means of it, as well as their (ordinary) truth or untruth, to be assessment sensitive or use sensitive. This explains the title of this dissertation.

This introduction has four sections. In the first one I make explicit some significant assumptions concerning the notion of accuracy and its relation to formal semantics as applied to natural languages. As we shall see, this section is relevant to understand the significance of the notion of accuracy for a comparative analysis of the views considered in this dissertation. In the second section I offer a brief characterization of the general approaches that shall be contrasted throughout this thesis: truth relativism, non-indexical contextualism, indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism. In the third section I give a general presentation of the purported evidence supporting truth relativism. In the fourth and last section I offer an overview of the chapters and how they relate to each other.

### **1.1. Formal semantics and accuracy**

It is common usage to present a philosophical theory about natural language as a semantic theory. Be that as it may, if we understand “semantics” strictly as a formal recursive definition of sentential and propositional truth, it is clear that any theory about natural language is not a semantic theory but makes use of such a theory to somehow model natural language phenomena. This is, I submit, what philosophers of language who appeal to truth-conditional semantic theories do and (at least tacitly) intend to. It is not entirely clear, though, what is the precise intended relation between a given semantics and such phenomena in virtue of which the former would account for the latter. This section tries to make explicit some assumptions about this relation that involve the notion of accuracy and are tacitly made within the debate over truth relativism.

A natural language can be conceived formally as a function that assigns meanings to syntactic units, i.e. words, phrases and sentences. What entitles us to consider one such function as the right one for the natural language we are studying? As Max Kölbel (2009, 377) points out, in order to answer this question we need (at least) to answer two previous questions:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I have slightly modified Kölbel’s formulation of these questions to better fit my expository purposes.

Q1: What kind of meanings our preferred function assigns to sentences, and how it assigns these meanings?

Q2: What is the relation this function has to the linguistic phenomena belonging to the natural language we are studying?

Let us address these questions in connection with declarative sentences and see how the notion of accuracy can be brought to bear.

The semantic framework that most of the theories we shall consider use (with modifications) is the one due to David Kaplan (1989).<sup>5</sup> In a Kaplanian standard semantics for a natural language the truth-value of a sentence  $s$  is relative to a *context*  $c$  and an index  $i$ , whereas the truth-value of the proposition  $p$  expressed by  $s$  in  $c$  (i.e. the content of  $s$  at  $c$ ) is relative to a circumstance of evaluation  $e$ .<sup>6</sup> Contexts are taken to be sequences of values for certain parameters (typically a speaker, a time, a position and a possible world) representing possible concrete situations where a sentence can be used.<sup>7</sup> Indices and circumstances of evaluation, in turn, are sequences of values for certain parameters (i.e. a possible world and possibly a time, plus an assignment to the variables in the case of indices) used as points at which we can respectively evaluate for truth a sentence in context or a proposition. All expressions (i.e. linguistic types) in our object language have characters associated with them. Characters are functions from contexts to contents (propositions are the contents of sentences), which in turn are functions from circumstances of evaluation to extensions (a truth-value is the extension of a proposition). Whereas some atomic expressions' characters are constants functions, others (e.g. expressions like "I," "he," "you" or "here") have characters that can yield –like the complex expressions that contain them– different contents across contexts. According to what we have said, one role of context –via the resolution of indexicals and demonstratives– is to determine which proposition is expressed by a sentence when used in context. This

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<sup>5</sup> As we shall see, John MacFarlane (2014, 52-60) also appeals to David Lewis's (1980, 1998) similar framework.

<sup>6</sup> Kaplan (1989) does not make an explicit distinction between the evaluation points of sentences in context and the evaluation points of their contents. Be that as it may, as MacFarlane (2014, 55-60, 81-84) shows, we may need different parameters in one and the other. In particular, the former, unlike the latter, must include an assignment to the variables to deal with sentences containing quantifiers. Following him, I have chosen to simply call the sentential evaluation points "indices," and the propositional evaluation points "circumstances of evaluation." It is worth noting that it is fairly common to call any sequence of parametric values an "index."

<sup>7</sup> We shall ultimately understand contexts as these possible concrete situations themselves.

significantly constrains our answer to Q1: there are two levels of meaning, character and content, and the latter is the value yielded by the former function once a context is taken as argument. A second role of context is to fix an index<sup>8</sup>/circumstance, namely the world of the context and possibly the time of the context, for evaluating the sentence in context or the proposition it expresses for truth. This second contribution of context enables us, from our actual and present context, to choose the actual world and the present time for evaluating for simple ordinary truth a sentence in context or the proposition expressed by it. Whereas the first role of context is played at a strictly semantic level and is part of a recursive definition of sentential and propositional truth, the second one –at least for the theories we shall consider– lies on the border between our formal semantics and our theories of speech acts and propositional attitudes. It is in this second stage where our semantics is meant to connect to ordinary truth and, derivatively, to a notion of assertion and belief token accuracy having practical relevance.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is in connection with this second stage that an answer to Q2 could be provided.

Speech acts constitute observable instances of language use and so a semantic theory for a natural language should be contrasted with them.<sup>10</sup> The speech act of assertion, in turn, represents our typical use of declarative sentences and, as we suggested at the beginning, we use the term “accuracy” to express a truth-derived dimension of evaluation of assertions (as well as belief tokens). In a Kaplanian framework, the following semantic application principles involving accuracy would be assumed:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Strictly speaking, the context fixes a set of indices containing the actual world, possibly the present time and any assignment to the variables. For simplicity’s sake, we leave this assignment aside and take a context as fixing a single index.

<sup>9</sup> Note that once we countenance propositions that can have different truth-values across actual contexts (i.e. propositions that are neutral with respect to some parameter over and above the world parameter), we should, in order to have a correlate of assertion at the level of belief, talk about the accuracy or inaccuracy of belief tokens understood as concrete mental states held in particular contexts. Accordingly, we can consider a context where a proposition is believed as playing the same role as a context where a sentence is used to assert a proposition.

<sup>10</sup> It is usually assumed that we have inter-subjective evidence concerning which utterances are correct or felicitous. This is the main reason why the below stated principles talk about assertive utterance and not about belief. Nevertheless, analogous principles could be formulated for belief tokens.

<sup>11</sup> We could also state semantic application principles involving the notion of ordinary truth instead of the notion of accuracy. Such principles could be used to conceptually link the ordinary monadic truth notion to the technical non-monadic one used in A1 and A2.

A1: For a sentence  $s$  of a natural language, an assertive utterance of  $s$  made in context  $c$  is accurate iff  $s$  is true relative to  $c$  and  $i_c$ , i.e. it is true at  $c$  (where  $i_c$  stands for the index determined by  $c$ ).

A2: For the proposition  $p$  that  $s$  expresses in  $c$ , an assertive utterance of  $p$  made in  $c$  is accurate iff  $p$  is true relative to  $e_c$ , i.e. it is true at  $c$  (where  $e_c$  stands for the circumstance of evaluation determined by  $c$ ).<sup>12, 13</sup>

These principles make use of an absolute notion of accuracy: the context of use determines, once and for all, how an assertion must be assessed for accuracy, which means that the accuracy or inaccuracy of an assertion does not vary across assessors.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, truth relativism does not endorse them, only non-relativist views do. In the next section we shall see how the relativist application principles could look like, whereas in the third section we explain in some detail what reason there is for endorsing such principles. For now, let us give a preliminary description of the motivation for relativizing accuracy and then close this section by making three clarifications concerning the notion of accuracy.

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<sup>12</sup> Kaplan (1989, 522) states the following principle concerning the truth of occurrences of sentences:  
*O*: An occurrence of sentence  $s$  in context  $c$  is true iff the proposition expressed by  $s$  in  $c$  is true at the circumstance of  $c$ .

A1 and A2 follows from *O* together with the following natural bridge principle:

*B*: An assertive utterance of  $s$  in  $c$  is accurate iff an occurrence of  $s$  in  $c$  is true.

<sup>13</sup> The following worry concerning the stated principles or their (not already seen) truth relativist counterparts could arise. These principles seem to imply that a sentence in context semantically expresses a proposition that can be identified with the content of an assertion made in that context, but this is a controversial thesis that many people involved in the debate over the semantics/pragmatics interface reject. It is certainly a somewhat contentious assumption made by the theories here considered that an assertion has a proposition as its content in a privileged sense: this proposition would be the asserted content as opposed to a merely implied one. This is a content that might be classed as *what is said* in a pragmatic sense (Recanati 2001; 2004, 1-22). Speech act pluralists (Herman Cappelen and Ernest Lepore 2005, 190-208) reject this assumption since they believe that many contents are usually asserted by means of one single assertive utterance and none of them is privileged in this way. Be that as it may, once this assumption is made, the particular worry of whether an asserted proposition can be considered as the semantic content of the sentence used can be assuaged. For our purposes, a semantic theory is understood as a formal device for modelling the truth conditions of the contents asserted by means of literally using declarative sentences in context. This does not imply that the asserted propositions are semantic contents in any special sense, e.g. it does not imply that a proposition is asserted by means of a distinctively semantic process as opposed to a merely pragmatic one. We shall thus, following most truth relativists, understand contexts in a broad sense, i.e. as including any pragmatic factor that may explain why a particular content is asserted by using a sentence. Hence, we assume that contents can be assigned to sentences (in context) and their assertions, which for our modelling purposes we call “semantic contents.”

<sup>14</sup> We are, as most people involved in the debate over truth relativism do, assuming that an assertion occurs at a unique context and so that if this context fixes a circumstance of evaluation, the assertion is assessed as accurate or inaccurate once and for all. As Dan López de Sa (2009, 3-4) argues, there are people who would reject this assumption, since they believe that an utterance can belong to several possible worlds and that a context determines just one world.

Relativists adduce a range of apparent disagreements and retractions as the main evidence for their view.<sup>15</sup> In cases where, for instance, two people respectively utter assertively “Mutton is tasty” and “Mutton is not tasty,” we would have at the same time the impression that they disagree with each other and that both of them are perfectly entitled to make their assertions –what else but their own taste could license such assertions? A relativist treatment of “tasty” would vindicate these appearances by assigning contradictory contents (in the sense of being impossible for them to be jointly true relative to a single perspective or context of assessment) to these sentences in context and by taking the truth of these contents (propositions), as well as the accuracy of their assertions, to be relative to a perspective or context of assessment. Relative to each disagreeing party’s perspective/context of assessment, her own assertion is accurate and the other party’s assertion is inaccurate. Non-relativist views, in turn, would not vindicate these appearances. As we shall see, the indexical contextualist takes the seemingly disagreeing parties as asserting different compatible propositions (e.g. those expressed by their respective uses of “Mutton is tasty to me”) as long as they occupy relevantly different contexts. Accordingly, the indexical contextualist considers that there is no genuine disagreement between the parties insofar as their assertions can be both absolutely (non-relatively) accurate. The evaluative invariantist takes the parties to be predicating a property (tastiness) whose extension does not vary across contexts located at the same world and time. Thus, the evaluative invariantist vindicates the appearance of disagreement but claims that at least one of the parties is absolutely mistaken (inaccurate), and so not ultimately entitled to make her assertion. Finally, the non-indexical contextualist grants the relativist that the parties assert contradictory propositions but –like the indexical contextualist- claims that both assertions can be absolutely accurate, and so that there is no genuine disagreement between the parties.

To close this section, some clarifications concerning the concept of accuracy are in order. First of all, I have chosen not to talk of truth as applied to assertions and beliefs because, following John MacFarlane (2007, 23; 2008, 94; 2009, 248; 2014, 71), I consider that the predicate “true” is not usually applied to intentional acts or mental states in ordinary discourse. As he contends, in ordinary speech this predicate

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<sup>15</sup> As we shall see, retractions can be seen as manifestations of a special kind of disagreements: those where the agent disagrees with her previous self. Thus, for simplicity’s sake I only talk of disagreement in this section.

would be commonly applied only to the contents of beliefs and some intentional acts (e.g. what someone says, asserts or believes). Appealing to a common philosophical term, MacFarlane (2014, 71) chooses to call such contents “propositions.”<sup>16</sup> According to this terminological choice, then, propositions are defined as the contents of beliefs and certain intentional acts (typically assertions), under the assumption that both beliefs and these acts do have contents. To be sure, this understanding of propositions does not imply that a proposition actually is one of the technical entities philosophers associate with it (e.g. a structured entity or a function from circumstances of evaluation to truth-values).<sup>17</sup> Nor does it imply that ordinary speakers have some (more or less clear) grasp of any of these entities. Such technical entities may be better seen as devices used to model –in a more or less theoretically fruitful way- some features of propositions.

According to what we just said, what philosophers usually call “truth” when applied to an assertion or belief, is more naturally expressed by the word “correctness.” But there are many aspects in which, say, an assertion can be correct or incorrect. For instance, it can be sincere or insincere, polite or impolite. The kind of correctness philosophers would have in mind when considering an assertion as

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<sup>16</sup> In MacFarlane’s words:

Propositions, as I understand them, are the contents of assertions and beliefs, and the things we call “true” or “false” in ordinary discourse. (MacFarlane 2014, 71)

In ordinary speech, people predicate truth of propositions (that is, of what is said or asserted or believed), not of utterances. (MacFarlane 2009, 248)

In order to support such claims, MacFarlane (2014, 71) provides the following example:

Anne: The president should get out of Afghanistan.

Bill: That is true.

Cynthia: François believes that too.

In this conversation, the word “that” –which arguably does not shift its reference- should not be seen as referring to Anne’s assertion or to her belief understood as a concrete mental state, since François cannot be said to believe such things. And this word should not be seen as referring to the sentence Anne used either, since she could have expressed what she believed by means of using other sentences, including sentences from other languages than English. It may be argued, though, that this word could refer to a belief type of which Anne’s belief, qua concrete mental state, is an instance. But notice that a sentence like “Bill believes what Anne said, and what Anne said is true” sounds perfectly fine, and we cannot interpret “what Anne said,” as it occurs in this sentence, as designating a belief type or as designating an utterance type. We do not find any of these difficulties if we take “that” in the first example and “what Anne said” in the second, as designating a proposition. To be sure, it may be possible to take these expressions, as they occur in the examples just presented, as designating a type of event of predication of which both belief tokens and utterances can be instances. But as Scott Soames (2010, 103-104) argues, a proposition can be understood as such a type.

<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, MacFarlane (2014, 72) remains neutral on the question of how the nature of propositions should be exactly conceived of.

true or untrue would be, as we shall see, directly related to the truth or untruth of the asserted proposition or, better, to its truth or untruth at certain relevant context(s). It is to express this particular sense of “correctness” that MacFarlane (2007, 23; 2014) introduces the term “accuracy.”

Relatedly, we must notice that despite this term being technical in the sense that we do not find it being applied to assertions and belief tokens in our daily life, we should not take the notion expressed by an accuracy predicate that is monadic (at least in its syntactic surface) to be technical.<sup>18</sup> All the views we shall consider are supposed to have testable consequences concerning the accuracy of assertions and belief tokens and how it affects speakers’ behaviour and intuitions. In particular, as we shall see, a theory’s predictions concerning accuracy is meant to have an impact on whether two people disagree with each other or certain assertions should be retracted and, relatedly, on which norms govern assertion and belief.

Finally, and most importantly, we would derive the ordinary notion of accuracy from an explanatorily prior truth notion via one of the following biconditionals:<sup>19</sup>

*Truth and accuracy*<sub>1</sub>: An (actual) assertion of/token belief in a proposition  $p$  is accurate iff  $p$  is true.

*Truth and accuracy*<sub>2</sub>: An assertion of/token belief in a proposition  $p$  is accurate iff  $p$  is true at the context of assertion/belief (i.e. the context of use).<sup>20</sup>

As we shall see, some of the views considered in this dissertation differ with respect to which of these principles they can endorse. We should not conclude from this and other differences between the views that they work with different notions of accuracy instead of disagreeing about how accuracy should be conceived of. The (ordinary) notion of accuracy is identified as one that guides a certain range of

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<sup>18</sup> MacFarlane (2009, 248) suggests that the notion of *utterance truth*, and so the notion of accuracy, is utterly technical. For the reasons I present in the main text, I believe that his proposal rests on the contrary thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Kölbel (2008c) rejects the orthodox view that propositional truth is explanatorily prior to assertion and token belief accuracy. We shall argue against his particular take on the relation between truth and accuracy in chapter 3.

<sup>20</sup> It can be argued that the notion of *truth at the context of assertion/belief* is not pre-theoretical, and so that an assessor could derive no ordinary notion of accuracy from it. I believe that it is not implausible to take speakers as having intuitive access to the notion of *truth at the context of assertion/belief* once we bear in mind that a context should be understood here as a concrete situation.

intuitions and behaviours, such as the ones involved in disagreements and retractions. In the following section we shall explain in more detail how the general approaches here considered differ in their conceptions of accuracy.

## 1.2. The approaches

### 1.2.1. Truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism

All the approaches we shall consider are alternative proposals to truth-conditionally account for the regular use of certain linguistic expressions in declarative sentences. Based on Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne (2009, 10-17), we identify in this section three core features that help us to give a general characterization of both truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism.<sup>21</sup> In order to distinguish one view from the other we shall add a fourth feature to our characterization of each of these views. It is with respect to these last features that we shall comment on the semantic application principles involving the notion of accuracy endorsed by each approach. It is worth pointing out that this characterization of the approaches is meant to be neutral with respect to the differences shown by the particular relativist proposals on offer. Thus, it should not be taken as our endorsed ultimate characterization of these approaches: in the two next chapters we shall argue that truth relativism should be defined in terms of assessment sensitivity, and accordingly non-indexical contextualism should be defined in terms of use sensitivity. It is also worth noting that it was MacFarlane (2009; 2014, 88-89) who introduced the term “non-indexical contextualism,” and he defined it in terms of use sensitivity. The approach we class in this chapter as non-indexical contextualism without (at least explicitly) appealing to the notion of use sensitivity, has been called “moderate relativism” by authors like García-Carpintero (2008) and Kölbel (2008b).

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<sup>21</sup> The features Cappelen and Hawthorne present do not correspond exactly to the ones I mention. Besides, they present their features as characterizing truth relativism but not non-indexical contextualism. This is not because they do not discriminate between these views but because of a difference between one of their features (i.e. what they call “disquotation”) and the one that in my presentation corresponds to it (i.e. what I call “monadic disquotational truth”). Unlike myself, they take truth to stand both for propositional truth and utterance truth (which I would call “utterance accuracy”).

Truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism about an expression (e.g. “tasty”), unlike the rest of the proposals here considered, take the content of the expression, as well as the propositions usually expressed by declarative sentences containing an unembedded occurrence of it, to be *neutral* or *non-specific* with respect to a parameter that is introduced in the circumstances of evaluation to give a semantics for this expression and possibly others that are alike (e.g. a standard of taste or judge parameter).<sup>22</sup> The extension of both the content of this expression and the propositions usually expressed by the above-mentioned sentences (the extension of a proposition is a truth-value) could vary depending on the value taken by the special parameter. However, the expression is usually taken to have a contextually invariant content. Let us call this feature *content neutrality*.

To be sure, relativists have included additional parameters in the circumstances of evaluation over and above the ones traditionally included by a Kaplanian standard semantics (i.e. a world and, possibly, a time parameter), and have accordingly countenanced contents that are neutral with respect to them. For instance, they have introduced a taste standard or judge parameter to deal with sentences containing predicates of personal taste, a knowledge standard parameter to account for our use of knowledge ascriptions and an information state or judge parameter to deal with epistemic modal sentences (i.e. sentences containing expressions like “might” or “must” under an epistemic reading). For this reason, Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, 10) identify as a distinctive trait of truth relativism what they call “proliferation,” which consists in positing additional parameters in the circumstances over and above the traditional ones. But, as MacFarlane’s (2003, 2008, 2014) argues and we shall explain in chapter 5, we can formulate a relativist view on future contingents while only including a world parameter in our circumstances.<sup>23</sup> A moral MacFarlane (2014, 51-52) draws from this is that what makes a proposal relativist is not to include some exotic parameter in the circumstances, but to understand the relativization of truth to this parameter in a particular way that leads to the relativization of accuracy. We shall resume this issue in following chapters. For now, it suffices to say that any truth

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<sup>22</sup> To be sure, this parameter is also introduced in the indices relative to which sentential truth is defined. But only its presence in the circumstances of evaluation has an impact on the extensions assigned to the contents that are non-specific with respect to it.

<sup>23</sup> Notice that world-neutral propositions are countenanced by anyone who takes some propositions to be contingent.

relativist proposal –as well as any non-indexical contextualist view- must accept some kind of content neutrality.

A second feature characterizing truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism is the *non-relativity of content attributions*, as applied mainly to sentences, assertions and beliefs.<sup>24</sup> Briefly put, this feature consists in the assumption that it is not relative to a parametric value subject to a relativist or non-indexical contextualist treatment what content a sentence in context, an assertion or a belief has. The non-relativity of content attributions –together with the assumption that that-clauses occurring in assertion and belief ascriptions express propositions that are the objects of assertion and belief- entails that the truth of an assertion or belief ascription where the that-clause contains an expression subject to a relativist or non-indexical contextualist treatment in connection with parameter P, is not itself relative to the value taken by P. For instance, assuming that simple sentences containing “tasty” express propositions that are standard of taste-neutral, the truth of the following ascription would not be relative to a standard of taste:

- (1) John asserts (believes) that mutton is tasty.

We mentioned this second feature because relativists exploit it to account for the appearances of disagreement and retraction lending support to their view. Truth relativism –as well as non-indexical contextualism- considers that it is natural to say that two people, say John and Ann, have beliefs in contradictory contents when one sincerely utters assertively “Mutton is tasty” and the other does the same with “Mutton is not tasty.”<sup>25</sup> Analogously, when one single person assertively and sincerely utters each of these sentences at different times, we can see her as believing contradictory contents over time. As we shall see in the next section, relativists need this to be so in order to take a range of disagreements and retractions as supporting their views. But without taking content attributions to be non-relative, one may not be licensed to make such assumptions in the afore-mentioned scenarios: the

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<sup>24</sup> This feature corresponds to the one Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, 14-17) call “non-relativity of semantic value and belief reports.” As it is suggested by the name they give to this feature, they do not consider, as I do, the case of assertion.

<sup>25</sup> Relatedly, relativists want to say that two people believe the same thing when they both sincerely and assertively utter, say, “Mutton is tasty.”

proposition that John and Ann have beliefs in contradictory contents may turn out to be false relative to some or all standards of taste.

In the third place, truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism accept a notion of *monadic disquotational truth*, which would be commonly expressed by the ordinary truth predicate from the language being studied. This allegedly ordinary notion is monadic, insofar as its extension is a set of propositions and not a set of ordered n-tuples of some sort. As a result, no hidden argument place is posited to account for the behaviour of the ordinary truth predicate. Why are we calling this notion “disquotational”? Because, assuming that we are in a position to make the disquotational claim that sentence ‘s’ is being used to express that s,<sup>26</sup> we could also claim that the proposition expressed by means of ‘s’ is true iff that s is true. Thus, a distinctive feature of this notion is that it renders true at every circumstance of evaluation all propositions that are instances of the following schema:

*Equivalence Schema:* The proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ .<sup>27</sup>

The validity of this schema is due to the fact that at each circumstance of evaluation the ordinary monadic truth notion is taken to have as its extension only the set of propositions that are true at that circumstance.

On a truth relativist or non-indexical contextualist view, it is important to vindicate the *Equivalence Schema* not only because we have the strong intuition that it is valid, but also because these views posit monadic disquotational truth and falsehood predicates to account for certain speeches. For instance, as we shall see, an alleged advantage of these views over alternative proposals is that we can see two speakers, say Ann and John, as being both entitled to respectively assert or believe the proposition expressed by “John believes/asserted that mutton is tasty, and that is false” and the one expressed by “Ann believes/asserted that mutton is not tasty, and that is false.” Each of them can be entitled to make her assertion, and in particular to assertively utter the second conjunct of the sentence each of them use, insofar as the proposition each one evaluates as false is false at the circumstance relevant at the context each one occupies.

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<sup>26</sup> In order to be in such a position, we need to know that the sentence we intend to disquote lacks any expression that makes different contributions to propositional content in the original context where it is used and in the context where we make the disquotational claim.

<sup>27</sup> Or, in formal vocabulary:  $\forall x ((x = \text{the proposition that } p) \supset (\text{true}(x) \equiv p))$ .

As we pointed out at the beginning, the difference between truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism is that whereas the former considers that the accuracy of the assertions having certain propositions as contents can vary with the assessor, the latter takes their accuracy to be absolute. Once all parametric values are fixed by the context where a proposition is asserted, the accuracy or inaccuracy of the assertion is fixed once and for all.<sup>28</sup> In other words, whereas both approaches see truth as relative to some (possibly non-traditional) parametric values, only truth relativism takes the accuracy of assertions to be relative. Let us see what the semantic application principles involving accuracy are for these approaches, as well as some related issues.

On a non-indexical contextualist view about an expression, the context where it is used to make an assertion or hold a belief fixes a value for the special parameter introduced to assign an extension to the expression and its content. This means that, insofar as we ignore the possibility of other vocabulary deserving a relativist treatment, non-indexical contextualism about an expression endorses the Kaplanian semantic application principles A1 and A2 introduced in the last section, which appeal to a non-relative accuracy notion.<sup>29, 30</sup>

Before moving on to the principles assumed by truth relativists, it is worth noting that views positing some non-world parameter in the circumstances whose value is to be fixed by the context of use lead to an understanding of the link between truth and accuracy that some authors (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009, 22-24; Patrick Greenough 2011, 200-201) find objectionable. In such applications, non-indexical contextualism must reject *Truth and accuracy*<sub>1</sub> and endorse only *Truth and accuracy*<sub>2</sub>,<sup>31</sup> which allows for the possibility of someone consistently uttering a sentence like (2):

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<sup>28</sup> We are here simplifying matters, since one could accept a relativist treatment of an expression and a non-indexical contextualist treatment of another expression.

<sup>29</sup> To be sure, a non-indexical contextualist about a given expression (e.g. “tasty”) may need to include some parameter (e.g. a standard of taste parameter) in the indices and circumstances that is not countenanced by a standard Kaplanian semantics.

<sup>30</sup> Note that according to our characterization of non-indexical contextualism, most people accepting a possible world or temporal semantics for a natural language in fact endorse non-indexical contextualist views, since they see most regular sentences in context as expressing world-neutral and/or time-neutral propositions and take accuracy to be absolute.

<sup>31</sup> Recall that these principles run as follows:

*Truth and accuracy*<sub>1</sub>: An (actual) assertion of/token belief in a proposition *p* is accurate iff *p* is true.

*Truth and accuracy*<sub>2</sub>: An assertion of/token belief in a proposition *p* is accurate iff *p* is true at the context of assertion/belief (i.e. the context of use).

- (2) The proposition John asserts is false (true) but his assertion is accurate (inaccurate).

Suppose that non-indexical contextualism about “tasty” is true and that relative to the operative standard of taste in the context one occupies (say, the taste standard one endorses) the proposition John asserts is true (false), whereas relative to the standard of taste in play in John’s context (say, the taste standard John endorses) this proposition is false (true). In such a situation one would be entitled to assertively utter (2) and this, it may be claimed, is counterintuitive.<sup>32</sup>

We can assuage this worry by pointing to the technicality of the word “accuracy” as applied to assertions and belief tokens. Due to this technicality, regular speakers would never utter sentences like (2).<sup>33</sup> This does not commit us to say –as MacFarlane (2009, 248) seems to do when considering the notion of utterance truth– that the notion of accuracy itself is purely technical. Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, 23) object to this possible response by claiming that if this notion were purely technical it would be devoid of any philosophical significance. But as we pointed out in the previous section, we should say that, in a sentence like (2), it is the term “accuracy” but not the notion expressed by it that is technical. Once these considerations are made, the divorce between truth and accuracy established by these non-indexical contextualist views does not look too problematic.

Truth relativism, in turn, cannot accept application principles A1 and A2, since they deploy a non-relativist accuracy notion. That much is clear but the assumed application principles involving accuracy vary from certain relativist proposals to others, and in the case of some other relativist proposals it is simply not clear what these principles are. Be that as it may, it is possible to lay down the different application principles assumed by two prominent truth relativists, namely Kölbel and MacFarlane. Their views will provide us with two distinctive examples of how

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<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that not in all of its applications non-indexical contextualism yields such a result. Possible world semantics is understood along non-indexical contextualist lines but the resulting view endorses *Truth and accuracy*<sub>1</sub>. The reason is that “is true” would be equivalent to “is true in the actual world,” whereas “is true in a non-actual world *w*” would be equivalent to a counterfactual phrase along the lines of “would be true if such and such were the case.”

<sup>33</sup> To be sure, “he is right (wrong)” would be used to imply that someone’s assertion or belief token is accurate (inaccurate), but it would also be used to express an acceptance (rejection) of the proposition asserted or believed.

relative accuracy can be conceived of. Let us briefly see what the principles endorsed by each proposal are.

In different papers Kölbel (2003, 70; 2008b, 18-19; 2009, 387) presents different formulations of the application principles assumed in his view on predicates of personal taste. The following principles are an attempt to summarize these formulations:<sup>34</sup>

K1: An assertive utterance of a proposition  $p$  made in a context  $c$  is *accurate by an individual  $a$ 's lights* iff  $p$  is true at  $\langle W(c), S(a) \rangle$  (where  $W(c)$  is the world of  $c$  and  $S(a)$  is the standard of taste of  $a$ ).

K2: For all declarative sentences  $s$ , contexts  $c$  and individuals  $a$ :

An assertive utterance of  $s$  made in  $c$  is *accurate by  $a$ 's lights* iff  $s$  expresses in  $c$  a proposition that is true at  $\langle W(c), S(a) \rangle$ .<sup>35</sup>

As we shall see in the next two chapters, according to these principles accuracy is a dyadic notion relating assertions and standards (or, alternatively, perspectives). Since this dyadic notion is used in Kölbel's application principles, it is meant to have practical relevance. According to this picture, uses of an accuracy predicate that is monadic in its syntactic surface express this non-monadic notion, which can also be expressed by an accuracy predicate that is superficially non-monadic. *Truth and accuracy*<sub>1</sub> could be vindicated if we assumed that in this biconditional the hidden standard variable of the accuracy predicate always takes the same value as the standard parameter in the index/circumstance determining the extension of the monadic truth predicate.

On the other hand, in his writings MacFarlane arguably assumes application principles like the following ones:

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<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting that Kölbel does not use the term "accuracy" but speaks instead of assertions as being *correct* or *incorrect*, or *true* or *untrue*.

<sup>35</sup> The application principle that most resembles the principles presented in the main text is found in Kölbel (2009, 397), where the following principle is introduced:

A population  $P$  *uses* a particular language  $L$  just if:

for every sentence  $s$  of  $L$  and for every person  $S$ , an utterance of  $s$  in a context  $c$  counts as **correct by  $S$ 's lights** in  $P$  iff the content  $L$  assigns to  $s$  in  $c$  is true at the world of  $c$  and the standard of  $S$  in  $c$ .

In turn, in a much earlier paper, Kölbel (2003, 70) formulates the truth relativist correctness conditions of beliefs as follows:

It is a mistake to believe a proposition that is not true in one's own perspective.

M1: An assertive utterance of a proposition  $p$  made in a context  $c$  is *accurate* iff  $p$  is true as used at  $c$  and assessed from the context one occupies.

M2: For all declarative sentences  $s$  and contexts  $c$ :

An assertive utterance of  $s$  made in  $c$  is *accurate* iff  $s$  expresses in  $c$  a proposition that is true as used at  $c$  and assessed from the context one occupies.<sup>36</sup>

The right hand sides of these biconditionals appeal to MacFarlane's definition of *truth at a context* from the second-stage of his Kaplan style semantic framework. We shall explain MacFarlane's proposal in the next chapter. For now, it suffices to notice that on MacFarlane's view, the accuracy predicate used in M1 and M2 expresses a monadic and assessment sensitive accuracy notion, i.e. a notion that has a set of elements (not a set of n-tuples) as its extension (e.g. a set of assertions or belief tokens) relative to the context of the assessor. This context fixes some parametric value(s) for truth and accuracy assessments (e.g. a standard of taste), and so it has an impact on how assessment sensitive propositions and their assertions are evaluated.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the monadic accuracy and truth predicates would express monadic assessment sensitive notions that, insofar as the circumstances do not contain non-world parameters whose values are fixed by the context of use, are linked by *Truth and accuracy*<sub>1</sub>.

### 1.2.2. Indexical contextualism and evaluative invariance

Many of the arguments for truth relativism consist in adducing its advantages over other more traditional alternatives. Indexical contextualism (often simply called "contextualism") is usually considered the main alternative, since it represents the orthodox semantic treatment of most of the expressions for which truth relativist

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<sup>36</sup> As MacFarlane (2014, 78) points out, it sounds odd to talk of a proposition being used at a context because a proposition is not used in the same way as a sentence is. When I make an assertion, the asserted proposition is what I asserted and not –like the uttered sentence– something that I used to make the assertion. Be that as it may, one can ask which truth-value a proposition has relative to a context in which a sentence might be used, and so one can, in an extended sense, see assertions or belief tokens as uses of the propositions asserted or believed.

<sup>37</sup> As we shall explain, when we assess a proposition for truth, the context of assessment coincides with the context of use (i.e. the context where we entertain the proposition) and so the practical difference between assessment sensitivity and use sensitivity does not manifest itself at the level of truth assessments but at the level of accuracy assessments. This squares well with our general characterization of truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism.

proposals have been offered. Be that as it may, there is another approach in the space of possible alternatives that often plays a role in the arguments for relativism about predicates of personal taste. I call this approach “evaluative invariantism.” Both indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism are compatible with and endorsement of application principles A1 and A2 and biconditional *Truth and accuracy*<sub>1</sub>.

To begin with, we –following MacFarlane (2009, 231-233; 2014, 78-81)- class as indexical contextualist any view about an expression that claims that its contribution to propositional content can vary across the contexts at which the expression is used. According to indexical contextualism about “tasty,” simple sentences containing this predicate (e.g. “Mutton is tasty”) are regularly used to express different propositions at different contexts. For instance, the content of Ann’s assertive utterance of “Mutton is tasty” could be the proposition that Mutton is tasty to Ann/relative to Ann’s standard of taste, while the content of John’s assertive utterance of this very same sentence could be the proposition that Mutton is tasty to John/relative to John’s standard of taste.

Our use of the term “indexical” in our characterization of this approach is a broad one that does not distinguish between different ways in which an expression’s contribution to propositional content might depend on context.<sup>38</sup> However, we shall distinguish between *solipsistic* and *collective* forms of indexical contextualism when dealing with epistemic modals and predicates of personal taste. The former approach takes the speaker or her epistemic state/standard of taste as being tacitly talked about when using these expressions. The latter approach, in turn, takes a group or conversationally relevant epistemic state/standard of taste as tacitly being talked about.

On the other hand, the approach we class as evaluative invariantism holds that a predicate (e.g. “tasty”) expresses across contexts a single property whose extension (e.g. the set of tasty things) does not vary across contexts located at the same world

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<sup>38</sup> Often, this term is used in a narrower sense according to which an expression is indexical only if its character together with a context of use determines its content without the mediation of pragmatic processes.

and time.<sup>39</sup> This approach has been also called “realism” (Kölbel 2003; Crispin Wright 2001) or “objectivism” (MacFarlane 2014, 2-7).<sup>40</sup>

### 1.3. The evidence for truth relativism

As we noticed at the beginning, we shall question the evidence adduced for truth relativism in different areas to the degree that is necessary to accommodate a general problem we shall pose to this approach. As a result, alternative non-indexical contextualist proposals will be shown as attractive for someone moved by the bulk of this purported evidence.

In this section I present, in a general way (i.e. not in connection with the particular cases for which truth relativist proposals have been formulated), the evidence adduced for the relativist views on offer and briefly explain why the main alternative approaches (i.e. non-indexical contextualism, indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism) could not account for it. The evidence is classified in three types corresponding to three subsections: disagreements, retractions and evidence for sameness of content. The latter category includes evidence that does not discriminate between truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism. Therefore, this evidence will not be the main focus of our attention when dealing with particular cases.

#### 1.3.1. Disagreements

Certain (apparent) disagreements have been adduced as the main evidence for truth relativism. Despite this, it is not clear how we should describe such disagreements. The category that has been used the most to classify them is that of *faultless disagreement*. This category has one *prima facie* virtue: it seems applicable

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<sup>39</sup> Clearly, in a framework that makes room for world and time neutral propositions, an evaluative invariantist about, say, “tasty” can claim that something tasty may have a different flavour and so be not tasty at different worlds or times.

<sup>40</sup> It is worth pointing out that in the case of knowledge ascriptions the term “invariantism” has been used to denominate a proposal that allows for some variation in the extension of “know(s)” in one single world. According to this proposal (Hawthorne 2004; Stanley 2005), “know(s)” expresses a contextually invariant relation, but a sentence ascribing knowledge can still vary its truth-value because of this verb. The reason, briefly put, is that knowing would amount to *being in an epistemic position that is good enough for the knower’s situation*, and the situation of the knower may change over time.

to most cases allegedly amenable to a relativist treatment. However, not every relativist accepts and uses this category for reasons made clear by Mark Richard (2008, 132) and Barry C. Smith (2010).<sup>41</sup> As an alternative, Smith (2010) uses the category of *intractable disagreement*. But this category, as we shall see, cannot be applied in most of the cases for which relativists treatments have been offered. Two other categories of disagreement introduced by MacFarlane (2014, 121-123; 125-128) are important: *preclusion of joint accuracy* and *doxastic non-cotenability*. As we shall explain, possible cases of doxastic non-cotenability involving faultlessness could be accounted for by non-indexical contextualism, whereas only truth relativism could account for cases of preclusion of joint accuracy involving faultlessness. Let us introduce all these categories and draw some morals concerning how we should describe the purported disagreements conferring support on truth relativism.

To begin with, the expression “faultless disagreement” was introduced by Kölbel (2003, 53-55) to refer to certain cases where it seems that two individuals *genuinely* (i.e. not as a result of misunderstanding or insincerity) disagree with each other despite both being free of any fault whatsoever.<sup>42</sup> The notion of *fault* at stake is such that saying that both parties are free of fault implies that neither of them is saying or believing something untrue. In turn, a disagreement is taken to be a relation holding between two or more people in virtue of some sincere assertions they made or beliefs they have concerning a certain subject matter.<sup>43, 44</sup> Accordingly, even though an actual dispute constitutes evidence for the existence of a disagreement, the disagreeing parties need not be involved in any dispute with each other. We can, thus, define a faultless disagreement as a situation where there is a proposition  $p$  and there are two individuals  $A, B$ , such that it *appears* that:<sup>45</sup>

(a)  $A$  and  $B$  genuinely disagree on whether  $p$ .

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<sup>41</sup> MacFarlane, for instance, does not appeal to this category when presenting his truth relativist proposals; he just talks about disagreements about the particular subject matter at issue. However, he (2014, 133-136) sees this category as one that we can make sense of in a truth relativist framework.

<sup>42</sup> Kölbel’s category of *faultless disagreement* is inspired in Crispin Wright’s (2001) category of *blameless disagreement*.

<sup>43</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 121-125) also acknowledges senses of the term “disagreement” according to which two people can be in disagreement in virtue of attitudes or speech acts that have no propositional content. Since these alleged disagreements cannot constitute evidence for truth relativism, I do not consider them here.

<sup>44</sup> Less naturally, we can also say of two assertions or beliefs that they are in disagreement.

<sup>45</sup> Notice that according to Kölbel’s definition, faultless disagreements are cases that *appear* in a certain way, and so it could turn out that they are not in the end cases of genuine disagreement involving faultlessness. Be that as it may, Kölbel’s proposal intends to vindicate such appearances.

(b) Neither *A* nor *B* is at fault.

Examples of such cases typically involve two individuals that respectively utter assertively (seem to believe two propositions expressed by) two seemingly contradictory sentences that do not appear to contain relevantly ambiguous or indexical expressions (i.e. expressions whose content vary across contexts in a way that explains away the disagreement). For instance, suppose Ann assertively utters (3) whereas John assertively utters (4):

(3) Mutton is tasty.

(4) Mutton is not tasty.

In such a case we would have the impression that these individuals genuinely disagree with each other, given that they seem to assert and believe contradictory propositions, and the impression that both are free of fault and so perfectly entitled to make their assertions and have their beliefs. Analogous cases could be found involving knowledge ascriptions, several gradable adjectives and epistemic modals.

Now, according to Kölbel's definition of faultless disagreement, non-indexical contextualism about an expression (e.g. "tasty") could account for it.<sup>46</sup> Notice that the parties to a faultless disagreement are seen as disagreeing merely because they sincerely assert and believe inconsistent propositions (in the sense that they cannot be jointly true at one single circumstance of evaluation). MacFarlane (2014, 121-123) classes this sort of disagreement as *doxastic non-cotenability*. Two people are in disagreement in this sense if they cannot coherently adopt the attitude the other has towards a proposition without changing her mind, i.e. without dropping some of her current attitudes. The attitudes that interest us are beliefs, which would be expressed by sincere assertions.<sup>47</sup> Since the non-indexical contextualist considers that two assertions or belief tokens whose contents are inconsistent with each other can be both accurate once and for all (i.e. absolutely accurate), she vindicates the possibility of faultless disagreements understood as cases of doxastic non-cotenability: the parties to a faultless disagreement would be disagreeing in virtue of believing

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<sup>46</sup> We should beware that according to Kölbel's terminology, non-indexical contextualism is a sort of truth relativism, namely the variant he calls "moderate relativism."

<sup>47</sup> According to MacFarlane (2014, 121-123), there are cases of doxastic non-cotenability involving many other attitudes, even non-doxastic ones like desires or preferences.

inconsistent propositions, and they would be fault free because different standards are absolutely relevant for assessing their sincere assertions and belief tokens for accuracy.

Be that as it may, many refuse to class cases of mere doxastic non-cotenability as cases of genuine disagreement. Arguably, the cases that motivate truth relativism appear to be cases of disagreement in a stronger sense. Two kinds of examples where the accuracy or inaccuracy of an assertion is naturally taken to be fixed by the context of use have been offered (MacFarlane 2007, 22-23; Recanati 2007, 90-91) to show that doxastic non-cotenability is not a sufficient condition for disagreement, as it is understood in the debate over truth relativism. Whereas in the first kind of case the disagreeing parties inhabit different worlds and assert contradictory world-neutral propositions, in the second kind of case they assert contradictory time-neutral propositions at different times. Let us consider two such examples. Suppose that Ann sincerely asserts (believes) in the actual world the proposition expressed by (5), John sincerely asserts (believes) in a world different from the actual one the proposition expressed by (6), and these propositions are inconsistent with each other and world-neutral:

- (5) The Earth has one satellite.
- (6) The Earth does not have one satellite.

Even though Ann and John assert contradictory propositions by means of uttering these sentences, we are not tempted to say that they disagree with each other in any significant sense. There is no significant disagreement insofar as their assertions are to be assessed relative to different contexts belonging to different worlds.<sup>48</sup> Concerning the second kind of examples, suppose that –following Kaplan’s (1989) suggestion- we adopt a non-indexical contextualist view on which tensed sentences without temporal indicators express time-neutral propositions that are true or false

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<sup>48</sup> Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, 64-66) argue that this is not a legitimate example. According to them, since possible worlds are just devices to semantically account for our modal talk, we cannot literally say that an individual asserts (believes) a proposition in a non-actual world. Consequently we cannot literally say that two people respectively assert (believe) two contradictory propositions at different possible worlds either. I take it that we should understand this example as one in which the assertion a speaker makes in the actual world cannot be seen as genuinely disagreeing with what another speaker *would have made* if he *had asserted (believed)* a contradictory proposition in some different possible scenario.

relative to circumstances including a time (as well as a possible world). Suppose now that, using the name “Mark” to refer to the same person, Ann assertively and sincerely utters (7) in the morning, John assertively and sincerely utters (8) at night, and both are inhabitants of the same world:

(7) Mark is eating.

(8) Mark is not eating.

As in the previous example, we do not have here any inclination to say that Ann and John genuinely disagree with each other, despite the fact that they are supposed to sincerely assert contradictory propositions.<sup>49</sup> Their assertions are not in conflict, since they are to be assessed relative to different contexts located at different times.

Truth relativism would be able to vindicate the appearances of faultless disagreement where the term “disagreement” is understood in a stronger sense. For this view, relative to the thing accuracy is relativized to (e.g. a perspective or a context of assessment), at least one of the disagreeing parties makes (has) an inaccurate assertion (belief token). This gives us a disagreement of the stronger sort MacFarlane (2014, 125-128) classifies as *preclusion of joint accuracy*, namely a disagreement where the accuracy of one assertion or belief token precludes the accuracy of the other.<sup>50</sup> How should a relativist conceive of the alleged faultlessness of such a disagreement? Roughly put, the disagreeing parties would be faultless given that their own assertions and belief tokens are accurate relative to their respective perspectives or contexts of assessment. As we shall see, this answer gives rise to difficult questions. For now, let us point out that in order to have a definition of faultless disagreement as a phenomenon lending support to truth relativism as

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<sup>49</sup> Notice that if Ann and John started a dispute by respectively defending and questioning their assertions, the dispute, insofar as they are not being irrational, would be a consequence of a misunderstanding not of a genuine disagreement.

<sup>50</sup> MacFarlane (2007, 24-25) characterizes disagreement, as applied to an acceptance and a rejection of a proposition, in terms of the modal condition *cannot both be accurate*. As he points out, this is not a sufficient condition for disagreement. Suppose that our semantics countenances time-neutral propositions and at noon Ann accepts the time-neutral proposition that the number of flies in the room is either odd or even, whereas John rejects this proposition at midnight. Given that this proposition is necessarily true, John’s rejection cannot be accurate and so Ann’s acceptance and John’s rejection cannot both be accurate. However, we are not tempted to say that they genuinely disagree. We could try to exclude cases where a necessary truth is involved, but this may have undesired results like making disagreements in mathematics impossible. Due to this sort of cases, MacFarlane (2014, 126) invites to use an intuitive modal notion of *preclusion of joint accuracy* that could be applied to pairs of assertions, acceptances or rejections, assuming that we have an intuitive grasp of how the accuracy of two such acts or attitudes precludes the accuracy of the other.

opposed to non-indexical contextualism, we need one further condition for a faultless disagreement over and above (a) and (b). And obvious candidate for such a condition is the following:

(c) Each party can correctly judge that the other party is wrong (inaccurate).

Non-indexical contextualism cannot accept (c). And leaving this approach aside, the obvious alternative truth-conditional accounts are evaluative invariantism and indexical contextualism. Evaluative invariantism about a predicate (e.g. “tasty”) holds that the predicate expresses, across contexts, a single property whose extension (e.g. the set of tasty things) does not vary across contexts located at the same world and time. As a result, evaluative invariantism is committed to say that one party is absolutely right and the other absolutely wrong (i.e. at fault) in any purported case of faultless disagreement. Thus, this view has to explain away the appearance of faultlessness. Besides, it faces the difficult task of explaining how common uses of a predicate like “tasty” got to invariably express a content whose extension does not vary across contexts located at the same world and time, given that speakers actually use this predicate differently across contexts.

In turn, indexical contextualism about an expression holds that this expression’s contribution to propositional content can vary across contexts. The simplest variant of indexical contextualism takes uses of declarative sentences containing an unembedded occurrence of the expression to tacitly allude either to the speaker or, for instance, to her standard of taste (in the case of predicates of personal taste) or her information state (in the case of epistemic modals). As a result, the parties to an alleged faultless disagreement would not be disagreeing, insofar as they would be asserting (believing) propositions that are consistent with each other. For example, by uttering (4) Ann would be asserting that mutton is tasty to her (or according to her taste), whereas by uttering (5) John would be asserting that mutton is tasty to him (or according to his taste). In other words, the simplest variant of indexical contextualism has to explain away the appearance of disagreement. Most indexical contextualist views on offer are more refined than this simple version of the approach and consist in different forms of collective indexical contextualism. According to collective indexical contextualism, uses of sentences like (4) and (5) tacitly allude to a contextually relevant group or, alternatively, standard or information state relevant

for this group. As a result, the disagreement part of a range of alleged faultless disagreements (i.e. those where the parties are involved in a conversation and so allude to the same contextually relevant group) would be vindicated but not their faultlessness part, which would have to be explained away. Be that as it may, as we shall see in the second part of this dissertation, philosophers like MacFarlane (2007, 2014) and Egan (2007, 2011) have presented cases –in particular what they call *eavesdropper cases*- showing that there are even inter-conversational disagreements supporting relativism that collective indexical contextualist views cannot vindicate.

Truth relativism is said to be able, unlike its rival views, to vindicate the alleged phenomenon of faultless disagreement as we defined it here (i.e. by means of conditions (a), (b) and (c)). The parties to a faultless disagreement would be disagreeing insofar as there is preclusion of joint accuracy, and they would be faultless given that their assertions or belief tokens are accurate relative to their respective perspectives/contexts of assessment. But, as I pointed out, not all advocates of truth relativism are happy with this way of describing the disagreements lending support to their view. The worry can be briefly described as follows: if we take accuracy to be relative to, say, perspectives or contexts of assessment, it turns out that from any perspective/context of assessment at least one of the parties to a purported faultless disagreement is at fault. In other words, from any perspective/context of assessment, a disagreement cannot be faultless.<sup>51</sup>

As it stands, this line of reasoning is too hasty. Nevertheless, the issues that it raises run deep and will ultimately become the main focus of this dissertation. Why is it too hasty? Because, after all, truth relativism is meant to allow for a sense in which two assertions or belief tokens are free of fault or, more to the point, accurate: the relativist theory makes use of a non-monadic accuracy predicate, and by means of it we can say –at least using the metalanguage of the theory- that two assertions of (token beliefs in) inconsistent propositions are both accurate relative to different perspectives/contexts of assessment. That is, the assertion (belief token) made (had) by *A* can be accurate relative to the perspective/context of assessment occupied by *A* (because the proposition she asserts or believes is true relative to that perspective/context), whereas the assertion (belief token) made (had) by *B* can be

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<sup>51</sup> Note that if a proposition is neither true nor false from a perspective/context of assessment, the assertions and belief tokens that have this proposition as content should be judged as inaccurate (i.e. not accurate) from that perspective/context of assessment.

accurate relative to the perspective/context of assessment occupied by *B* (because the proposition she asserts or believes is true relative to this latter perspective/context).

Be that as it may, as we shall see in the third chapter, if the only notion of accuracy we had was a non-monadic one expressed by this non-monadic accuracy predicate, we would fail to account for cases of faultless disagreement involving preclusion of joint accuracy: the parties could not be seen as genuinely disagreeing insofar as they would make (have) assertions (belief tokens) that are accurate or inaccurate in different ways (i.e. relative to different perspectives/context of assessment). This is a reason that relativists have for positing a monadic and assessment sensitive ordinary notion of accuracy, whose assessment sensitivity would be accounted for by non-monadic and theoretical truth and accuracy notions. But, as we shall see in chapters 3 and 4, once this strategy is adopted we face another question: we need to make sense of non-monadic truth and accuracy (i.e. the notions expressed by the non-monadic truth and accuracy predicates from the relativist theory) in terms of our ordinary monadic truth and accuracy notions. Thus, I believe that the main problem faced by truth relativism is implicit in the question of whether there are cases of faultless disagreement satisfying conditions (a), (b) and (c).

Despite what I have just said, the point stated two paragraphs back still stands: truth relativist views intend to allow for a sense in which two assertions of (token beliefs in) contradictory propositions can both be accurate relative to different perspectives/context of assessment. Whether they can succeed in this attempt is a question that requires an examination of the different truth relativist proposals and cannot be assumed from the start. Therefore, once these worries are taken into consideration, I see no harm in tentatively talking of faultless disagreement as a possible phenomenon lending support to truth relativism.

Another category used by some relativists (Smith, 2010) is that of *intractable disagreement*. An intractable disagreement is such that each party is disposed to judge that the other party is wrong (i.e. it seems to involve preclusion of joint accuracy) and the discrepancy is in principle unsolvable by purely rational means. Granted, a disagreement could be unsolvable by rational means for many reasons that are not relevant here, e.g. it could happen that one of the parties is too stubborn to recognize that she is wrong or simply unable to behave rationally when considering certain topics. The idea is that it cannot be so solved in principle, no matter whether the parties are perfectly rational and willing to recognize that they are

wrong about the subject matter at issue. Thus, the intractability could be plausibly traced to some –let us say- subjective commitments made by the parties, which in more theoretical vocabulary we could describe as the fact that the parties occupy different perspectives or contexts of assessment.

A problem with the category of intractable disagreement, as we shall see in the second part of this dissertation, is that it can only be used to support truth relativism in the case of the expressions I class in chapter 8 as *idiosyncratically evaluative*. Typical examples of such expressions would be personal taste (e.g. “tasty,” “disgusting”), aesthetic and moral predicates. The evidence for the existence of intractable disagreements in this case consists in the existence of apparent intractable disputes that would manifest them. In the rest of the cases subject to a relativist treatment we do not find intractable disputes and disagreements. Take, for example, a dispute involving epistemic modals such as “might” and “cannot” (under an epistemic reading) where Ann assertively utters (9) and John rejects Ann’s assertion by assertively uttering (10):

(9) Peter might be in Paris.

(10) Peter cannot be in Paris.

This dispute can surely be solved by purely rational means. John could offer Mary some evidence showing that Peter is not in Paris. For instance, John can tell Mary that he received a call from Peter this morning telling him that he was in London. If Mary is rational and believes that John is being sincere and has good grounds for saying what he is saying, she will conclude that John has some information about Peter that she lacks and so that Peter cannot be in Paris. As we shall see in chapter 6, similar considerations can be brought to bear in the case of knowledge ascriptions.

The notion of intractable disagreement will prove useful when dealing with idiosyncratically evaluative predicates but it is not useful in the rest of the cases. The notion of faultless disagreement, in turn, could in principle be applied all across the board but it raises difficult conceptual issues once we consider it in connection with truth relativism. Fortunately, when dealing with particular cases subject to a relativist treatment we will often be able to just talk about apparent disagreements lending support to a given relativist proposal.

### 1.3.2. Retractions

MacFarlane (2005a, 2014) –as well as, following his lead, Egan (2011, 233-235)- has focused his attention on retractions of assertions previously made by means of using expressions allegedly deserving a relativist treatment. These retractions would constitute evidence for a truth relativist account of the expressions involved as opposed to an indexical or non-indexical contextualist one.

A retraction is taken to be a speech act by means of which one retracts another earlier speech act. In the cases that concern us, the retracted acts are assertions. One could perform a retraction by saying things like “I take that back,” “I retract that” or “Ok, I admit that I was wrong.” The effect of retracting a speech act would be to undo the normative commitments undertaken when the speech act was made. Based on Robert Brandom’s (1983, 1994) account of assertion, MacFarlane considers that the commitments undertaken by making an assertion and undone by retracting it are, for instance, being obliged to respond to challenges to the assertion or being responsible for others relying on one’s authority for the accuracy of the assertion. How would retractions constitute evidence for truth relativism and against indexical and non-indexical contextualism?

Let us consider an example from MacFarlane (2014, 109-110). Suppose that ten year-old Joey, who likes fish sticks, assertively utters “Fish sticks are tasty” at context  $c_1$ . Let us use “ $a$ ” to name this assertion. On a contextualist treatment of  $a$  it makes no sense for Joey to retract  $a$  at a later context  $c_2$  because of a change in his taste. The accuracy of  $a$  is seen as absolute, insofar as the parametric values relevant for assessing  $a$  are taken to be fixed by the context at which it is made. Consequently, if  $a$  was accurate at the context at which it was made it should not be retracted. The fact that non-indexical contextualism, unlike indexical contextualism, countenances a judge or taste parameter in the circumstances as well as contents that are neutral with respect to it, makes no difference in this respect.

In turn, MacFarlane’s truth relativism yields the result that, after a change in his taste for fish sticks, Joey should retract  $a$  at any context he may occupy. The taste standard endorsed by the assessor at her context would be the special parametric value relevant for truth and accuracy assessments, and so from the perspective or context(s) occupied by Joey after this change in his taste,  $a$  is inaccurate and so it should be retracted. This, the relativist argues, is as it should be, since people tend to

retract such assertions when they taste changes. And analogous examples involving other expressions for which truth relativism has been proposed can be adduced.

To close this subsection, it is worth noting that retractions can be seen as manifestations of a particular kind of disagreement, namely a disagreement that someone has with her previous self, assertions or beliefs.

### 1.3.3. Evidence for sameness of content

Another sort of evidence adduced in support of truth relativism and against indexical contextualism is aimed at showing that the expressions being considered do not make different contributions to propositional content across contexts. As a matter of fact, this type of data lends support to any view that assigns contextually invariant contents to these expressions (e.g. truth relativism, non-indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism). Consequently, this evidence is not going to be the main focus of our attention throughout this dissertation. As we explained, we shall only challenge the data that is necessary to challenge in order to take into account a general problem that truth relativism faces. As it happens, these are the data meant to support truth relativism as opposed to non-indexical contextualism.

To begin with, several proponents of truth relativism (Egan 2011; Kölbel 2009; Richard 2004, 2008, 91-92) have argued that the way we make say-that reports suggests that the contents of the expressions under consideration do not vary across contexts. Words that paradigmatically vary their content with context are indexicals like “I” or demonstratives like “he,” “she” or “that,” and we cannot always report what someone said by means of one of these expressions by using it. For example, in case John assertively uttered “*I* heard that it would rain,” I must, when reporting in a different context what he said, substitute the indexical occurring in the previous sentence for an expression that has the same content (in the case of directly referential terms, like indexical and demonstratives, their content is their reference) in the reporting context as the indexical had in John’s context. Thus, I could report what John said by using the sentence “John said that *he* heard that it was going to rain.” This would be a consequence of the fact that indexicals and demonstratives can vary their contents across contexts: when such an expression has different contents in the context of the subject of the report and in the reporter’s context, the reporter has to use a different indexical or demonstrative from the one the subject of

the report used. In turn, when we report what someone said by means of using an expression allegedly amenable to a relativist treatment (e.g. “tasty”), we at the same time use this expression and make no obvious allusion to the special feature (e.g. a taste standard) in play at the context of the subject of the report. Suppose that, for instance, Ann assertively utters (3) (i.e. “Mutton is tasty”). Arguably, we can in any context report what Ann said with (11):

(11) Ann said that mutton is tasty.

And this, it is argued, constitutes evidence that “tasty” makes the same contribution to propositional content across contexts. To be sure, this type of evidence is hardly conclusive, since not all expressions that make different contributions to propositional content across contexts need to behave in the exact same way as indexicals and demonstratives do.<sup>52</sup>

Another kind of evidence for the same conclusion comes from what Kölbel (2009, 391-392) calls “object language assessments of what is said,” which consist in truth assessments using the ordinary truth predicate of something said in another context. Take the initial example of Ann and John respectively uttering (3) (i.e. Mutton is tasty) and (4) (i.e. Mutton is not tasty). It is awkward for Ann to assertively utter (12) immediately after the just-mentioned utterances of (3) and (4):

(12) What John said is true.

The proposition (12) expresses seems, like the one (4) expresses, inconsistent with the proposition (3) expresses, and so Ann seems guilty of incoherence. The relativist straightforwardly vindicates these appearances by taking “tasty” as expressing a contextually invariant content, by naturally assuming that with “what John said” in (12) Ann refers to the proposition John asserted by means of using (3) and by holding that the ordinary English predicate “true” conforms to the *Equivalence Schema*.<sup>53</sup> In turn, the simplest indexical contextualist proposal holds that the proposition John asserted by means of (3) (i.e. roughly, the proposition that mutton is tasty to him) is compatible with the one Ann asserts by means of (4) (i.e. roughly, the

<sup>52</sup> For a criticism of this sort of purported evidence see Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, 34-54).

<sup>53</sup> Recall that this schema states the following: the proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ .

proposition that mutton is tasty to her). As a result, for this proposal Ann can coherently utter (12) assertively.<sup>54</sup>

To be sure, most indexical contextualist views on offer consist of different forms of collective indexical contextualism that are able to vindicate –though in less straightforward ways- the inconsistency in cases where Ann and John are members of a single conversation. Be that as it may, the example could explicitly state that Ann makes her assessment from a context (concrete situation) distant from the one John occupied when making his assertion, and Ann would not turn out to be inconsistent. We shall see in the second part how such examples can be devised.

A further type of evidence that could be thought of is the presence of an operator shifting some special parametric value relevant for assessing certain sentences. The existence of such an operator would support the thesis that these sentences invariantly express propositions that are neutral with respect to this parameter, e.g. a standard of taste parameter.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, it would be evidence for either truth relativism or non-indexical contextualism and against indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism. But as a matter of fact, relativists have not generally appealed to this type of evidence, since indexical contextualism seems capable to account for the use of any candidate expression. Rather, they argue for their proposal based on other considerations and then, in order to accommodate some linguistic data, invite us to understand certain linguistic constructions such as ‘for *a*’ or ‘to *a*’ (where *a* refers to an individual) as sentential operators. However, as Kölbel (2009, 393-394) argues, the relativist construal of these constructions as operators shifting the standard of taste or judge when followed or preceded by a sentence containing a predicate of personal taste, put it ahead of evaluative invariantism about such predicates. An evaluative invariantist has to understand the ‘For *a*, *S*’ construction as

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<sup>54</sup> In turn, as Kölbel (2009, 391-392) points out, an analogous case involving other expressions that are commonly seen as indexically context-sensitive is perfectly acceptable. Consider the following three assertive utterances of sentences (i), (ii) and (iii):

Ann: (i) Peter is *my* nephew.

John: (ii) Peter is not *my* nephew.

Ann: (iii) What John said is true.

(i) and (ii), as respectively used by Ann and John, make reference to different speakers. As a result, Ann and John do not assert contradictory propositions by means of such sentences and Ann can, without being incoherent, assertively utter (iii).

<sup>55</sup> If such a proposition were not neutral with respect to this parameter, the operator would have no impact on how to assess it. On the assumption that natural languages do not tend to have operators that have no impact on how to evaluate a proposition, the existence of a sentential operator counts as evidence for the neutrality of the content of the embedded sentence with respect to the parameter whose value the operator shifts.

saying something like ‘*a* believes that *S*.’ But, Kölbel argues, there are counterexamples to such an understanding: it seems coherent to utter “John has no view as to whether mutton is tasty, but it is tasty for him.” In turn, indexical contextualists can say that the construction ‘For *a*, *S*,’ where *S* contains “tasty,” simply makes explicit a hidden argument place in “tasty.”

#### 1.4. An overview of the chapters

This dissertation has two parts. In the first one, comprised by chapters 2 to 4, I address general issues concerning how truth relativism should be ultimately characterized and, relatedly, which are the challenges that it faces. In the second one, comprised by chapters 5 to 8, I analyze particular cases for which relativist treatments have been proposed.

In chapter 2, I compare the merits and demerits of six relativist views on offer and conclude that a proposal trading on the notion of assessment sensitivity provides, unlike the ones that do not, some explanation of the relation between truth and accuracy.

In chapter 3, I address some criticisms aimed at showing that truth relativism is unable to make sense of our practice of making assertions (and, relatedly, forming beliefs). First of all, I argue that the proper way to answer this sort of objections is by taking assessment sensitive truth as a norm and aim of assertion. This, together with the morals drawn in the second chapter, singles out the task of making sense of the notion of *truth relative to a context of assessment* as fundamental to the relativist. I close this chapter by arguing that in order to accomplish this task the relativist has to provide an explanatory link between ordinary monadic truth and her non-monadic truth notion by means of characterizing the latter in terms of the former.

Chapter 4 analyzes the linking question in light of a dilemma introduced by Paul Boghossian (2011) specifically for the relativist. I first argue that this dilemma creates a peculiar linking problem for truth relativism in most of its applications. Then I identify the only linking explanation that could help the relativist to answer this dilemma, and take note of two linking explanations non-indexical contextualism could endorse. Roughly put, the linking explanation the relativist should endorse

consists in privileging her own context of assessment by considering a *right* context of assessment (i.e. a context fixing the *right* parametric values) as opposed to others that would not be *right*. The question of whether such an explanation works should be addressed in a case-by-case-basis, since it depends on whether we can make sense of the notion of *right context of assessment* in each case subject to a relativist treatment. I close this chapter by considering an objection faced by this linking explanation in most of its applications.

The rest of the chapters deal with particular applications of our preferred relativist framework to different sorts of expressions. The main aim of this part of the dissertation is to determine whether, in each case subject to a relativist treatment, there is a sense to be made of the notion of *right context of assessment* and so an answer to the specific linking problem faced by the relativist.

Chapter 5 addresses MacFarlane's (2003, 2008, 2014) relativist proposal on future contingents. I show that this view can provide a straightforward explanatory link, insofar as there is a simple way of spelling out the notion of *right context of assessment* in terms of the notion of *actuality* and its connection with the notion of truth. Be that as it may, I argue that the proposal is not well supported by the evidence. The only possible evidence lending support to this view consists in certain accuracy assessments of claims made in the past, and we can put into question the existence of such assessments. I conclude that the question of whether we should go relativist in this case is dependent on whether there are other cases deserving a relativist treatment that make this proposal non-*ad hoc*.

In chapter 6 I deal with truth relativism about knowledge ascriptions (MacFarlane 2005b, 2005c, 2011a, 2014; Richard 2004, 2008).<sup>56</sup> I argue that the relativist has no way out of the linking problem because of the way the extension of "know(s)" is fixed according to her. This extension would be fixed by practical or conversational contextual factors such as the practical matters at stake, the operant conversational purposes and presuppositions or the possibilities that have been mentioned or considered. I then question the evidence adduced for truth relativism and against non-indexical contextualism and argue that, all things considered, the latter view is plausible and preferable to the former one.

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<sup>56</sup> It is worth pointing out that the considerations put forward in this chapter about a relativist treatment of "know(s)" can be also applied to truth relativism about a range of gradable adjectives (e.g. "rich" or "flat"). Richard (2008) defends a truth relativist view about such adjectives.

Chapter 7 deals with truth relativism about epistemic modals (Egan et al. 2005; Egan 2007, 2011; MacFarlane 2010, 2011d, 2014; Stephenson 2007).<sup>57</sup> I consider two puzzles present in the literature on epistemic modals. According to the relativist, non-indexical contextualism only solves the first puzzle, whereas her proposal solves both puzzles. I argue that the relativist cannot answer the linking challenge in this case because of a problem singled out by Richard Dietz (2008). As a result, the features of our use of epistemic modals that would be shown by the second puzzle should be explained away. I close this chapter by tentatively offering such an explanation.

Chapter 8 deals with the case of –what I class as- idiosyncratically evaluative predicates. Paradigmatic examples of such predicates are personal (gustatory) taste, aesthetic and moral predicates. I contend that there is a *prima facie* more plausible case for a relativist treatment of these predicates (Kölbel 2008, 2009; Lasersohn 2005, MacFarlane 2007, 2014; Richard 2008) than for a relativist treatment of knowledge ascriptions and epistemic modals. Be that as it may, the relativist still needs to address difficult philosophical issues to make sense of the notion of *right context of assessment*. I close the chapter by arguing for a non-indexical contextualist treatment of idiosyncratically evaluative predicates. In particular, I argue that non-indexical contextualism does not face the difficult questions truth relativism faces and the ignorance and error it has to attribute to speakers are less problematic than the ones other alternative proposals have to attribute.

In the final remarks I mention two morals drawn and two issues not addressed in this dissertation. Briefly put, the morals are that (i) truth relativism should be understood as an account of the assessment sensitivity of truth and (ii) in order to make sense of the notion of *truth relative to a context of assessment* the relativist has to solve a peculiar linking problem, which we have reason to think that cannot be successfully answered. In turn, the dissertation has the following limitations: (i) I do not analyze in detail the evidence adduced against indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism but rather take for granted –for the sake of argument- its legitimacy, and (ii) I do not consider expressivist proposals but only truth-conditional ones. I close the final remarks by mentioning some questions that arise from

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<sup>57</sup> It is worth noting that the considerations presented in this chapter concerning truth relativism about epistemic modals are directly relevant to an evaluation of a relativist treatment of “ought” as used in practical deliberation (MacFarlane 2014).

comparing Allan Gibbard's (1990, 2003) expressivism with truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism.

## Part I

# Truth Relativism as an Account of the Assessment Sensitivity of Truth

## 2

**Truth Relativist Proposals**

In this chapter I introduce what I take to be the main truth relativist frameworks on offer and consider their relative virtues and flaws. I shall class the approaches as being of three general types depending on how relative accuracy is conceived of. Relative accuracy has been seen as a consequence of the assessment sensitivity of truth, as a result of a phenomenon we may call “pragmatic freedom” or simply as following from the non-standard parameter neutrality (i.e. neutrality to a parameter other than the world or time parameter) of certain contents. The last option, as we shall see, amounts to ignore the possibility of non-indexical contextualist views introducing non-standard parameters in the circumstances.

Why do I use this criterion (i.e. how a theory conceives of relative accuracy) to classify the views? Because we –following MacFarlane’s lead– understand truth relativism as a view that relativizes accuracy and, as a result, how a relativist should conceive of relative accuracy and its relation to propositional truth becomes a crucial issue. As we shall explain in this chapter and the next, a relativist view that appeals to the notion of assessment sensitivity can, unlike alternative proposals, provide some explanation of the connection between truth and accuracy.

This chapter has four sections. In the first one I present two proposals that make room for contexts of assessment: MacFarlane’s (2005a, 2012, 2014) view, which is the main representative of this approach, and Andy Egan’s (Egan et al. 2005; Egan, 2011). In the second section I consider two proposals that appeal to a purported phenomenon of pragmatic freedom, namely Max Kölbel’s (2008b, 2008c, 2009) and Peter Lasersohn’s (2005) views, and comment on some shortcomings they have in comparison with the theories of the first type. In the third section I deal with two views that simply treat relative accuracy as a byproduct of the non-standard parameter neutrality of some contents: the proposals advocated by Tamina Stephenson (2007) and Mark Richard (2004, 2008, 2011). We shall find that these proposals provide no explanation of the relativity of accuracy. Finally, in the fourth

and last section, I summarize the relative merits and demerits found in these views. The question of how we should conceive of truth relativism shall be resumed in the next chapter.

## 2.1. First type of view

### 2.1.1. John MacFarlane's proposal

MacFarlane's proposal treads on the notion of assessment sensitivity and as a result yields a neat picture of how relative accuracy derives from propositional truth. It would be odd if truth relativism could only be defined from within a theory of assertion or belief. Fortunately, we can make sense of the notion of assessment sensitivity at a purely sentential and propositional level, despite this notion having an impact on how the accuracy of assertions and belief tokens is conceived of.<sup>1</sup> Given that propositions are considered as the objects of assertions and beliefs, we will be mainly interested in the impact of assessment sensitivity at the propositional level. However, in order to have a clearer picture of MacFarlane's view, we shall first explain how his proposal works at the sentential level.

In order to understand what assessment sensitivity is we need to understand what a context of assessment is, and in particular how it differs from a context of use. MacFarlane (2005a, 309; 2014, 60-61) conceives of contexts of use and contexts of assessment as possible situations in which a sentence or proposition is used or assessed. A context in this sense can be formally represented as a sequence of values for several parameters (an agent, world, time, location etc.) or as a *centered world* (i.e. a world together with a designated agent, time or location in the world). In the case of a context of use the agent is the speaker at the context, whereas in the case of a context of assessment the agent is the assessor at the context. Ontologically, then, there is no difference between contexts of use and contexts of assessment. The difference suggested by the labels "use" and "assessment" has to do with the

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<sup>1</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 114-117) argues that we cannot empirically distinguish truth relativism from non-indexical contextualism just at the level of belief. However, once we distinguish these positions at the level of assertion, it follows that they also differ in how belief tokens are to be assessed.

different roles we give to these contexts in our semantics or better, as we shall see, in our post-semantics: one can think of a context either as a possible situation of use or as a possible situation of assessment of a use of a sentence and a proposition. To be sure, these contexts can coincide: when one makes an assertion or has a token belief at a context, this context is at the same time one's context of use and one's context of assessment.

At the sentential and propositional level, MacFarlane (2003, 328-332; 2014, 58) distinguishes between the semantics proper and the post-semantics.<sup>2</sup> The semantics yields a technical recursive truth definition whereas the post-semantics yields a definition of *truth at a context* that is meant to have, unlike the semantic definition, practical relevance. More precisely, the notion of truth at a context is the one meant to directly relate to our assessments of assertions and token beliefs as accurate or inaccurate, and so to allow us to connect the recursive semantics to our theories of assertion and belief. It is in his post-semantic definition that MacFarlane gives contexts of assessment a crucial role to play.

At the sentential level, MacFarlane (2012, 2014, 55-64) appeals to David Lewis's (1980, 1998) semantic framework –which is similar to Kaplan's but does not countenance contents as an intermediate level between expressions and their extensions- and modifies it in order to make room for contexts of assessment. The semantics proper consists in a recursive definition of truth as a relation between sentences, contexts and indices.<sup>3</sup> As we pointed out, contexts can be formally represented either as sequences of parametric values (features of context) or as centered worlds. Indices, in turn, are sequences of certain parametric values called by Lewis “coordinates of the index,” which, unlike the values of a context, can be

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<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, MacFarlane (2014, 71-72) does not talk about a semantics but just about a definition of truth at a circumstance in the case of propositions. The reason for this could be that propositions may not represent something else and so may not be something for which we can give a semantics. Be that as it may, I decided, for the sake of simplicity, to present his proposal as one that offers a semantics and so also a post-semantics for propositions.

<sup>3</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 62-64) gives a semantic definition of sentential truth as a relation between sentences, contexts of use, contexts of assessment and indices. He does this not to presuppose that there is no expression in the language that requires to take contexts of assessment into account in order to recursively explain its contribution to the semantic truth conditions of sentences. However, his stance on the question of whether there is such an expression is rather negative, and so contexts of assessment ultimately become an idle wheel in the semantics proper. For this reason, in other places MacFarlane (2012) chooses not to make reference to contexts of assessment in his semantic sentential truth definition. For the sake of simplicity, I have followed this latter option. Be that as it may, it is worth pointing out that, with respect to the case of future contingents, MacFarlane (2008, 98-101) argues that it is necessary to take contexts of assessment into account in the semantics proper to deal with the “actually” operator.

arbitrarily combined (e.g. an index may have among its coordinates an agent, a time before her birth and a world that she does not occupy) and include an assignment to the variables to deal with the quantifiers of the language. Why do we define sentential truth in relation to contexts and indices? In the semantics, dependence on context is motivated by the existence of natural language sentences whose truth-value can vary across contexts located in the same world (e.g. sentences containing expressions such as indexicals and demonstratives): in order to recursively define truth for such sentences we need to take contexts into account. On the other hand, indices are needed first of all for the technical need of having a recursive truth definition for sentences containing non-truth functional operators such as temporal and alethic operators, which shift one coordinate (e.g. the time or the world) leaving the rest untouched.<sup>4</sup> The existence of a given non-truth functional operator in the language is, thus, a reason to include a corresponding parameter in the indices (e.g. a world or time parameter). As we shall see next, indices are also needed if we want to give both contexts of use and contexts of assessment a role to play in our sentential post-semantics.

As we pointed out, the sentential truth notion we are ultimately interested in is the post-semantic notion of *sentential truth at a context*, since it is the one having practical relevance. As it happens in Kaplan's framework, contexts play two roles: a semantic and a post-semantic one that consists in fixing the values of the parameters in the indices for sentential truth assessments. Ignoring the assignment to the variables, on Lewis's view these are the values that single out the index of the context  $c$  where a sentence is used (e.g. the index  $\langle w_c, t_c \rangle$  consisting of the world and time of the context  $c$ ).<sup>5</sup> Lewis's definition of truth at a context, thus, states that a sentence  $s$  is true at a context  $c$  iff it is true at  $c$  and the index of  $c$ . On MacFarlane's view, in turn, there are two contexts that are relevant for the post-semantic definition of sentential truth: the context of use and the context of assessment. His definition of sentential truth at a context, then, runs as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed explanation of why indices are needed for a semantic definition of sentential truth see MacFarlane (2014, 55-57).

<sup>5</sup> If we did not ignore the assignment to the variables, we would have to take the context of use as fixing the set of indices consisting of the world and time of the context and any assignment.

(ST) A sentence  $s$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from context  $c_2$  iff  $s$  is true at  $c_1$  and the index determined (differently) by  $c_1$  and  $c_2$ .<sup>6</sup>

Some parametric values, like a world and possibly a time, would be fixed by the context of use, whereas others, like a standard of taste or knowledge, would be fixed by the context of assessment (e.g. the standard of taste relevant for assessing simple sentences containing predicates of personal taste can be taken to be the one endorsed by the agent of this latter context).<sup>7</sup> To be sure, only the truth-value of an assessment sensitive sentence would depend on at least one of the parametric values fixed by the context of assessment, whereas the truth-value of assessment insensitive sentences would not depend on any of them.

How is this post-semantic definition meant to have an impact on how to assess assertions and belief tokens for accuracy? To answer this question we need a semantic and post-semantic definition of propositional truth,<sup>8</sup> since propositions would be at the same time the objects of assertion and belief and the contents expressed by uttering sentences. An assertion or belief token is taken to be accurate iff its content (i.e. a proposition) is true at the contextually relevant circumstance(s) of evaluation. Insofar as the context where an assertion is made or belief token held (the context of use) does not suffice to determine a circumstance (or set of circumstances) for assessing its content for truth, it cannot allow us to tell whether the assertion or belief token is accurate or inaccurate. In order to accomplish this we would need something else: a context of assessment.

At the propositional level, MacFarlane (2014, 76-81, 88-92) appeals to Kaplan's framework. On Kaplan's view, as we explained in the introduction, a context of use plays two roles: it determines which proposition is expressed by uttering a given sentence in the context and it fixes the relevant circumstance of evaluation (for

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<sup>6</sup> As we shall see in chapter 5 when dealing with the case of future contingents, even if we ignored the assignment to the variables there could be several indices compatible with one context. Hence, there is reason to prefer a definition of sentential truth at a context that quantifies over them as follows: a sentence  $s$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$  iff  $s$  is true at  $c_1$  and *all* indices compatible with both  $c_1$  and  $c_2$ , false iff it is not true at  $c_1$  and all these indices and neither true nor false in any other case.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, when formulating a relativist view on some particular set of expressions, we can, for the sake of simplicity, include in the indices and circumstances only the parameters needed to formulate the proposal.

<sup>8</sup> As we explained, MacFarlane (2014, 71-72) does not talk about a semantics but about a definition of truth at a circumstance in the case of propositions. However, I decided, for the sake of simplicity, to present his proposal as one that offers a semantics and so a post-semantics for propositions.

Kaplan, the ordered pair consisting of the world and time of the context) for assessing this proposition for truth.<sup>9</sup> Once contexts determine which propositions are expressed, we can give a recursive truth definition of propositional truth relative to circumstances of evaluation. The second contribution of context, in turn, allows us to define propositional truth at a context as follows: a proposition  $p$  is true at a context  $c$  iff  $p$  is true at the circumstance of evaluation determined by  $c$  (for Kaplan, the ordered pair  $\langle w_c, t_c \rangle$ ). According to this, the only context that ultimately matters for truth assessments is the one where the sentence and derivatively the proposition expressed is used.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, an assertion or belief token (i.e. a use of a proposition and a sentence) is accurate iff the proposition asserted or believed is true at the context of use. Kaplan's view is a form of non-indexical contextualism with respect to times and worlds, since he includes a time alongside a world in the circumstances, countenances time and world neutral propositions and takes accuracy to be absolute.

On MacFarlane's (2014, 90-92) view, in turn, there are two contexts to consider in the post-semantic definition of propositional truth at a context: the context of use and the context of assessment. We could choose to take contexts of assessment as also relevant at the semantic level to determine which proposition is expressed at a context of use by certain sentences (e.g. simple sentences containing "tasty"). This option yields a position known as *content relativism*, according to which a single utterance expresses different propositions relative to different contexts of assessment.<sup>11</sup> But this is not the type of relativism MacFarlane advocates. On his view, contexts of assessment play a role only in fixing the values of some parameters in the circumstance of evaluation in order to assign an extension to the contents that are neutral with respect to them; in the case of a proposition, the extension is a truth-value. The context of assessment could, for instance, fix a standard of taste as

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<sup>9</sup> In MacFarlane's framework the difference between indices and circumstances of evaluation is that the first ones are used in a definition of sentential truth, whereas the second ones are used in a definition of propositional truth. As a result, indices but not circumstances of evaluation contain an assignment to the variables among their coordinates.

<sup>10</sup> As MacFarlane (2014, 78) points out, it sounds odd to talk of a proposition being used at a context because a proposition is not used in the same way as a sentence is. When I make an assertion, the asserted proposition is what I asserted and not –like the uttered sentence– something that I used to make the assertion. Be that as it may, one can ask which truth-value a proposition has relative to a context in which a sentence might be used, and so one can, in an extended sense, see assertions or belief tokens as uses of the propositions asserted or believed.

<sup>11</sup> This position should not be confused with the view that there are many propositions one can assert with one single utterance act. According to this last position, everyone can agree about which propositions have been asserted, whereas for a content relativist there can be faultless or intractable disagreements over which proposition has been asserted: relative to different contexts of assessment, different propositions could have been asserted.

relevant to assess for truth the taste standard-neutral propositions expressed by simple sentences containing predicates of personal taste. Other parametric values, like the world, would be fixed by the context of use.<sup>12</sup> The post-semantic definition of propositional truth, then, runs as follows:

(PT) A proposition  $p$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from context  $c_2$  iff  $p$  is true at the circumstance of evaluation determined (differently) by  $c_1$  and  $c_2$ .<sup>13</sup>

According to (PT), an assertion made at  $c_1$  is assessed as accurate from  $c_2$  iff the asserted proposition is true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ . We can, thus, have a grasp on how (PT) is meant to be practically significant. In order to see how (ST) would be practically relevant we need to connect it to (PT) via the following principle:

(C) A sentence  $s$  is true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$  iff the proposition expressed by  $s$  in  $c_1$  is true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ .

To close this subsection, let us mention three aspects of MacFarlane's proposal that will be relevant from now on. First of all, as we saw, MacFarlane (2014, 90-92) considers that contents –as well as expressions- can in principle be assessment sensitive, use sensitive or both.<sup>14</sup> A content is assessment sensitive insofar as its extension depends on a feature of the context of assessment with respect to which the content is neutral, whereas it is use sensitive insofar as its extension depends on a feature of the context of use with respect to which the content is neutral.<sup>15, 16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> MacFarlane's proposal on future contingents would show that, as a matter of fact, we need to take a set of worlds to be jointly fixed by the context of use and the context of assessment.

<sup>13</sup> As we shall see in chapter 5, and just as it happens with indices in the definition of sentential truth, there could be several circumstances of evaluation compatible with one context. Hence, there is reason to prefer a definition of propositional truth at context that quantifies over circumstances as follows: a proposition  $p$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from context  $c_2$  iff  $p$  is true at all circumstances compatible with both  $c_1$  and  $c_2$ , false iff it is not true at all these circumstances and neither true nor false in any other case.

<sup>14</sup> As we saw, MacFarlane (2014) usually takes the world and time in the contextually relevant indices and circumstance(s) to be fixed by the context of use. According to him, then, assessment sensitive propositions that are contingent or time-neutral are also use sensitive.

<sup>15</sup> Since the extension of a proposition (i.e. the content of a sentence in context) is a truth-value, the dependence of certain propositions' truth-value on the context of assessment or the context of use, is a particular case of content assessment sensitivity or content use sensitivity.

With respect to the case of assessment sensitivity, MacFarlane explicitly states: “..it is an intrinsic property of a *content* that is assessment sensitive (or not)” (2014, 155). Thus, the assessment sensitivity MacFarlane posits is a feature of some contents that manifest itself in the post-semantics, not in the semantics proper (and the same goes for the use sensitivity of a content).<sup>17</sup> The characterization of contents that we find in the semantics (i.e. at this level, contents are taken to determine functions from circumstances to extensions) would be incomplete. To better characterize a given content, we would have at least to specify how a value (or set thereof) for each parameter in the circumstances that can affect the content’s extension is contextually fixed. And this information is found at the post-semantic level. Thus, if we wanted a brief post-semantic characterization of content in MacFarlane’s framework, we could say that contents are or at least determine functions from a context of use and a context of assessment to an extension.<sup>18</sup> In the case of an assessment sensitive content, the value of the function (an extension) can vary with the context of assessment that is taken as one of the arguments of this function. To be sure, this characterization presupposes that the way in which each of these contexts can affect the extension of a given content is by fixing certain values for some parameters in the circumstances of evaluation.

In turn, the kind of view about an expression that MacFarlane (2009; 2014, 88-90) calls “non-indexical contextualism” assigns to the expression a contextually invariant content that is assessment insensitive and use sensitive with respect to a

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<sup>16</sup> Note that the assessment sensitivity of an expression is in principle compatible with the assessment insensitivity of its content (MacFarlane 2014, 90-92). Recall that on a content relativist view, an expression can have different extensions at different contexts of assessment because of expressing different (assessment insensitive) contents at these contexts. Similarly, the use sensitivity of an expression is in principle compatible with the use insensitivity of its content (MacFarlane 2014, 78-81). On an indexical contextualist view about an expression, the expression can have different extensions at different contexts of use because of expressing different contents at these contexts.

<sup>17</sup> As we pointed out, MacFarlane (2014, 72, 76-92) adopts a definition of propositional truth relative to circumstances of evaluation and a definition of propositional truth relative to a context of use and a context of assessment, but does not class these definitions as respectively being a semantic and a post-semantic definition. However, as we explained, since he (2014, 52-64) does talk about a semantic and a post-semantic definition of sentential truth, and these definitions are respectively associated with the first and the second propositional truth definitions mentioned above, I decided, for ease of presentation, to also talk about a semantic and a post-semantic definition of propositional truth in MacFarlane’s framework.

<sup>18</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 71-72) remains neutral on the question of how propositions (i.e. the contents expressed by means of using declarative sentences) should be exactly conceived of. For him, propositions are, above all, abstract objects we use to characterize certain speech acts and mental states. Be that as it may, it is clear that, in his framework, propositions determine –at the semantic level- functions from circumstances to truth-values, and they determine –at the post-semantic level- functions from contexts of use and contexts of assessment to truth-values.

certain aspect of contexts or parameter in the circumstances.<sup>19</sup> Analogously to what happens in the case of assessment sensitivity, MacFarlane (2014, 78-81) conceives of the use sensitivity of certain contents (and, derivatively, expressions) as manifesting itself only in the post-semantics. At the semantic level (i.e. with respect to the definition of sentential truth at a context and index and propositional truth at a circumstance of evaluation), a non-indexical contextualist view about an expression (e.g. “tasty”) can coincide with a relativist view about that same expression. For a given feature of contexts parameter  $f$  (e.g. the operative standard of taste), these views could only differ in respectively taking the contextually invariant and  $f$ -neutral content they assign to the expression as being  $f$ -use sensitive and  $f$ -assessment sensitive. Thus, the characterization of content found at the semantic level (i.e. contents are taken to determine functions from circumstances to extensions) is incomplete, insofar as it does not tell us whether a given  $f$ -neutral content is  $f$ -use sensitive or  $f$ -assessment sensitive. There are two options one can choose from to provide a brief post-semantic characterization of use sensitive contents. First, if one thinks that both use sensitive and assessment sensitive contents are expressed in our language, one should take contents to be or at least determine functions from a context of use and a context of assessment to an extension, and take a use sensitive content to be such that the value (an extension) of the relevant function varies depending on the context of use that is taken as one of the arguments of this function. Second, if one thinks that use sensitive contents but not assessment sensitive ones are expressed in our language, one can say that contents are or at least determine functions from contexts of use to extensions, and take a use sensitive content to be such that the relevant function is not constant.<sup>20</sup>

A corollary of what we just said is that truth relativism about an expression sees accuracy as assessment sensitive, whereas non-indexical contextualism about an expression -as long as it does not take other expressions in the language to be

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<sup>19</sup> As we observed, a content could be, in principle, both use sensitive and assessment sensitive. It could happen that the content’s extension depends on parametric values fixed by the context of use and on parametric values fixed by the context of assessment. Moreover, it could be held –as we shall see in chapter 7- that a single parametric value relevant for the extension of certain contents is partially fixed by each of these contexts. Be that as it may, we –following MacFarlane (2009; 2014, 88-90)- class a view about an expression as *non-indexical contextualist* if it takes its content as being *only* use sensitive.

<sup>20</sup> To be sure, if one thinks that there is only use sensitivity in the language, one can still take contents to determine functions from contexts of use and contexts of assessment to extensions. It would just happen that the value of any such function would not vary with the context of assessment.

assessment sensitive- does not. For truth relativism, the context where an assertion is made (i.e. the context of use) does not fix a value (or set thereof) for all parameters in the circumstances. At least some of these values would depend on the context of assessment. Accordingly, the context of assertion would not suffice to determine a truth-value or lack thereof for an asserted assessment sensitive proposition. Since an assertion is taken to be accurate in virtue of the asserted proposition being true at the contextually relevant circumstance(s), an assertion of an assessment sensitive proposition could not be assessed for accuracy without a context of assessment. In turn, non-indexical contextualism about an expression does not relativize the accuracy of assertions. As long as the proposal is not combined with a relativist treatment of other expressions, the context of assertion would fix a value (or set thereof) for all parameters in the circumstances, and so would allow us to assess the assertion for accuracy once and for all.<sup>21</sup>

A second important aspect of MacFarlane's proposal is that it takes ordinary truth to be monadic and assessment sensitive. As MacFarlane (2005a 312; 2014, 93) stresses, the triadic truth predicate relating sentences or propositions to contexts of use and contexts of assessment is a technical term and not the object language predicate form our everyday talk. For MacFarlane (2014, 93-94), both in a truth relativist and non-indexical contextualist framework the object language predicate "true" has the following semantics:

*Semantics for ordinary truth:* "True" expresses the same monadic property across contexts but the extension of this property at a circumstance of evaluation may vary. The extension of "true" at a circumstance of evaluation  $e$  is the set of propositions that are true at  $e$ .

One consequence of this semantics for "true" is that all propositions that are instances of the *Equivalence Schema* (i.e. the proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ ) turn out to be true at every circumstance of evaluation. Now, whereas truth relativism

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<sup>21</sup> If we make room for contexts of assessment in the framework used to formulate this view, we can say that, according to it, the accuracy of an assertion does not vary across contexts of assessment. To be sure, the proposal, so formulated, does not give contexts of assessment any significant role to play. However, this way of presenting the view could make clearer the results it yields concerning accuracy assessments. Recall that, as we explained at the beginning of this subsection, for MacFarlane (2005a, 309; 2014, 60-61, 76-78) a context of use is a possible situation of use of a sentence and a proposition, whereas a context of assessment is a possible situation of assessment of such a use (e.g. an assertion).

considers ordinary truth as an assessment sensitive property because of certain propositions being assessment sensitive (i.e. some parametric values relevant for their truth assessment are taken to be fixed by the context of assessment), non-indexical contextualism takes ordinary truth to be use sensitive because of some propositions being use sensitive (i.e. some parametric values relevant for their truth assessment are taken to be fixed by the context of use). Of course, we can take truth to be at the same time assessment sensitive and use sensitive, e.g. assessment sensitive with respect to some expressions and parameters and use sensitive in connection with others.<sup>22</sup> We can even consider, as we shall see in chapter 7, that the value of a certain parameter in the circumstances is partially fixed by the context of use and partially fixed by the context of assessment.

Thirdly, MacFarlane takes monadic accuracy to be assessment sensitive as a result of the assessment sensitivity of ordinary truth. Insofar as the semantics does not countenance contents that are neutral with respect to a non-world parameter whose value is fixed by the context of use, an assessor can derive the accuracy or inaccuracy of an actual assertion/belief token by means of *Truth and accuracy*<sub>1</sub> (i.e. an (actual) assertion/belief token is accurate iff the asserted/believed proposition is true).<sup>23</sup> Since truth is assessment sensitive, monadic accuracy comes out as assessment sensitive as well. At the level of the metalanguage of the relativist theory, non-monadic truth and accuracy predicates respectively relating propositions and assertions or belief tokens to contexts of assessment, would account for the assessment sensitivity of monadic truth and accuracy.<sup>24</sup> But the inferential relation

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<sup>22</sup> In this regard, notice that none of the approaches here considered (i.e. truth relativism, non-indexical contextualism, indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism) are incompatible insofar as they are applied to different expressions.

<sup>23</sup> What should we say about a principle linking truth and accuracy in a MacFarlanian framework that mixes a relativist treatment of some expressions and non-world parameters with a non-indexical contextualist treatment of others? Such a view can endorse *Truth and accuracy*<sub>2</sub> (an assertion/belief token is accurate iff the asserted/believed proposition is true at the context of assertion/belief) and take *truth at the context of assertion/belief* as assessment sensitive (the parametric values relevant for its extension would be fixed by the context of assessment, while the ones fixed by the context of use would not affect its extension). In particular, a MacFarlanian framework countenancing time-neutral contents and including in the circumstances a time parameter whose value is fixed by the context of use, can endorse this principle but not *Truth and accuracy*<sub>1</sub>. According to this option, speakers have intuitive access to the notion of *truth at the context of assertion/belief*, which would account for the use sensitivity of the simple notion of truth. For the sake of simplicity, we do not consider this possibility in this chapter and the next.

<sup>24</sup> Assertions and belief tokens essentially belong to a particular context of use and so we can take non-monadic accuracy as just relating assertions and belief tokens to contexts of assessment. However, at the sentential and propositional levels contexts of use play the role of fixing some parametric values for truth assessments and so they cannot be left aside.

between truth and accuracy by means of which an assessor derives the latter from the former could occur in terms of assessment sensitive notions of truth and accuracy.

### 2.1.2. Andy Egan's proposal

Egan et al. (2005) and Egan (2011) defend a relativist proposal about epistemic modals that, like MacFarlane's, appeals to contexts of assessment.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, we can make about this proposal the same three observations we just made about MacFarlane's view. The main difference between these views is that Egan's proposal, unlike MacFarlane's, makes use of *de se* contents. As a result of this, as we shall see next, in Egan's proposal contexts of use do not play a role in the post-semantic definition of truth at a context but are only needed in the semantics to determine the content of a sentence in context.

According to Egan's (2011, 228-229) semantics, declarative sentences express in context *de se* contents that discriminate between possible situations modeled as centered worlds, more precisely as world, time and individual triples  $\langle w, t, i \rangle$ .<sup>26</sup> Centered worlds can differ in many respects from one another, and in particular they can differ in the epistemic state of the designated individual. Thus, in context, sentences containing an epistemic modal, as well as the propositions they express, can have different truth-values relative to centered worlds that differ in the designated individual. A sentence 'It might be that *S*' expresses in a context a *de se* proposition that is true at those centered worlds  $\langle w, t, i \rangle$  where the epistemic state of the individual *i* does not rule out the possibility that *S* expresses in that context, whereas a sentence 'It must be that *S*' expresses in a context a *de se* proposition that is true at those centered worlds  $\langle w, t, i \rangle$  where the epistemic state of the individual *i* rules out the possibility that *not-S* would express in that context. For Egan, then, *de se* propositions are or determine functions from centered worlds to truth-values. On this semantics, epistemic modals do not make different contributions to propositional content across contexts, since they are not used to allude to a given epistemic state.

This *de se* semantics is compatible with both a non-indexical contextualist post-

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<sup>25</sup> It is worth pointing out that in other papers, in particular in Egan (2007), Egan does not talk about contexts of assessment.

<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, in Egan's framework centered worlds play the role of circumstances of evaluation and not the role of contexts. Contexts, like in MacFarlane's framework, are conceived as possible concrete situations that fix the relevant parametric values for truth assessments.

semantics and a relativist post-semantics. Whereas the first one takes the centered world relevant for assessing propositions –and in particular those propositions expressed by sentences containing an epistemic modal- to be fixed by the context of use, a relativist post-semantics like the one Egan (2011, 229-230) advocates takes this centered world as fixed by the context of assessment.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, Egan sees epistemic modal propositions as assessment sensitive.

As we shall see in chapter 7, MacFarlane’s view on epistemic modals includes in the circumstances of evaluation an information state parameter whose value is fixed by the context of assessment, as well as other parameters (i.e. a world and a time parameter) whose values are fixed by the context of use. On Egan’s view, in turn, the circumstance of evaluation relevant for truth and accuracy assessments is exclusively fixed by the context of assessment (a possible situation of assessment), since this circumstance is conceived of as a centered world (a model of a possible situation). As we shall see in chapters 4, 7 and 8, this is a drawback of Egan’s view in comparison with MacFarlane’s because it yields assessments of sentences where the world or time is shifted that contravene the relativist purpose of relativizing accuracy. In order to get the proper results the relativist should be able to shift the parametric values of the circumstances of evaluation independently, and this is something we cannot do if we take circumstances as representing possible situations.

## 2.2. Second type of view

Unlike the theories of the first type, proposals belonging to the second type do not single out a feature of truth that results in the relativization of accuracy, but explain relative accuracy in terms of a phenomenon we may call “pragmatic freedom.” As we shall see, views treading on the notion of assessment sensitivity may not be incompatible with the views of the second type, but only the former ones provide a proper understanding of the relation between accuracy and truth.

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<sup>27</sup> It is worth pointing out that this does not mean that a *de se* relativist proposal is committed to consider the knowledge of the assessor as the relevant epistemic state. For instance, according to Egan (2007, 9), the relevant information state consists of the assessor’s knowledge plus every piece of information within her *epistemic reach*, which includes the information she could learn from her interlocutors.

### 2.2.1. Max Kölbel's proposal

As Kölbel (2008b, 7) points out, Kaplan's semantics takes the truth-value of a declarative sentence  $s$  to be relative to a context of use  $c$  and an index  $i$  consisting of a world and a time.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, Kölbel suggests that we can see this semantics as defining a triadic sentential truth property  $T(s, c, i)$ . In turn, Kaplan sees contents as functions from circumstances of evaluations  $e$  consisting of a world and a time to extensions. In particular, for Kaplan a sentence in context has a proposition as its content, which in turn has a truth-value as its extension relative to a circumstance of evaluation. Then, in Kaplan's semantics propositional truth could be seen as a dyadic property  $T(p, e)$ . Kölbel (2008b, 17-18; 2009, 383-384) invites us to introduce in our indices and circumstances some special parameter(s) (e.g. a taste standard parameter) that would allow us to account for a range of disagreements involving certain expressions, like predicates of personal taste.<sup>29</sup> The values that such a parameter can take involve particular *perspectives* from which someone can assess a given sentence or the proposition it expresses. By a perspective, Kölbel (2003, 71; 2009, 383) tentatively understands a set of personal features (e.g. the way of responding to different flavours in the case of predicates of personal taste) that normatively constrain how an individual possessing them must assess a certain range of propositions.

In particular, on Kölbel's view on predicates of personal taste, indices and circumstances are ordered pairs consisting of a world and a taste standard and simple declarative sentences containing these predicates usually express in context taste standard-neutral propositions. To be sure, only propositions expressed by sentences containing predicates of personal taste could have, in one single world, different truth-values relative to different standards of taste. This new relativization would be

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<sup>28</sup> Kölbel, like Kaplan (1989), does not make an explicit distinction between the evaluation points of sentences in context (indices) and those of propositions (circumstances of evaluation). As I explained, an assignment to the variables should be taken into account to evaluate sentences containing quantifiers but it is not needed to evaluate propositions. Following Kölbel, I here leave this assignment aside for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>29</sup> Kölbel (2002 116-118, 2008b 4, 2009 375-376) actually defines truth relativism as the view that truth is relative to something else over and above a possible world. Thus, according to his definition, Kaplan (1989) proposes a relativist view insofar as his circumstances consist of a time alongside a possible world.

idle in the case of other propositions.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Kölbel still defines sentential truth as a triadic property and propositional truth as dyadic one, but includes a special parameter in the indices and circumstances alongside the world parameter.<sup>31</sup>

As we explained in the introduction, any semantic theory about a range of natural language expressions is meant to account for how we use them via some – often implicit- semantic application principles. For the case of predicates of personal taste, Kölbel (2008b, 17-19) states non-indexical contextualist and relativist application principles concerning the accuracy (in his words, *correctness* or *truth*) conditions of assertive utterances.<sup>32</sup>

Non-indexical contextualism (i.e. the view that Kölbel (2008b) calls “moderate relativism”) takes the context of utterance as somehow fixing a standard of taste.<sup>33</sup> As a result, as Kölbel (2008b, 18) points out, this view endorses the following semantic application principles:

NC1: An assertive utterance of a proposition  $p$  made in a context  $c$  is accurate iff  $T(p, \langle W(c), S(c) \rangle)$  (where  $W(c)$  is the world of  $c$  and  $S(c)$  is the standard of taste determined by  $c$ ).

NC2: For all sentences  $s$  and contexts  $c$ :

An assertive utterance of  $s$  made in  $c$  is accurate iff  $T(s, c, \langle W(c), S(c) \rangle)$ .

According to this approach, the accuracy of assertions is absolute: there is only one answer to the question whether an assertion is accurate, namely the answer obtained by considering the context where the assertion was made.

Kölbel (2008b, 2009) advocates a different proposal on predicates of personal taste. On his view, a context of use does not determine a taste standard as relevant for

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<sup>30</sup> This relativization is meant to be also idle in the case of the contents of sentences like “Mutton is tasty for John” or “Mutton is tasty with respect to John’s standard of taste,” whose truth-value – assuming that the reference of “John” is held fixed- does not vary according to a standard of taste.

<sup>31</sup> As Kölbel (2008c, 245) points out, even though his technical sentential and propositional truth predicates are superficially triadic and dyadic once we take as arguments whole indices or circumstances, there is strictly speaking at least one additional argument place in these predicates. This is due to the fact that there is at least one additional parameter in the indices and circumstances over and above the world parameter.

<sup>32</sup> As we explained in the first chapter, it is usually assumed that we have evidence concerning which utterances are correct or felicitous. This is the reason why Kölbel’s principles talk about assertive utterance and not about, for instance, belief. Nevertheless, analogous principles could be formulated regarding belief tokens.

<sup>33</sup> As Kölbel (2008b, 18-19) points out, there are *prima facie* several ways in which a non-indexical contextualist can understand the function from contexts to standards of taste, so that the contextually relevant standard need not be always the one of the speaker.

assessing personal taste claims (i.e. assertions of propositions about matters of personal taste), and speakers are entitled to assess such claims relative to their own standards (Kölbel 2008b, 18-20; 2009 387-388).<sup>34</sup> Kölbel (2008b, 19-20) understands the difference between non-indexical contextualism and truth relativism as a difference in their respective pragmatics: whereas for the pragmatics accepted by the former approach accuracy is absolute, given that there is one taste standard fixed by the context of use, for a relativist pragmatics the context of use does not fix a standard of taste and speakers are entitled to assess personal taste claims relative to the taste standards they personally endorse.<sup>35</sup> We may call this purported phenomenon allowing speakers to assess assertions relative to their own taste standards “pragmatic freedom.” As we pointed out in the introduction, in different papers Kölbel (2003, 70; 2008b, 18-19; 2009, 387) proposes semantic application principles that allow us to infer the following two principles as the relativist counterparts of NC1 and NC2:

TR1: An assertive utterance of a proposition  $p$  made in a context  $c$  is accurate by an individual  $a$ 's lights iff  $T(p, \langle W(c), S(a) \rangle)$  (where  $W(c)$  is the world of  $c$  and  $S(a)$  is the standard of taste of the individual  $a$ ).

TR2: For all sentences  $s$ , contexts  $c$  and individuals  $a$ :

An assertive utterance of  $s$  made in  $c$  is accurate by  $a$ 's lights iff  $T(s, c, \langle W(c), S(a) \rangle)$ .<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In Kölbel's words: “Departure from an absolute truth norm in pragmatics could have various motives. For example, we might be unable to find a suitable function  $S$  that determines the value of the new parameter for each context of use with respect to which assertions are to be evaluated. Or there may be a number of distinct and complementary pragmatic norms, each of which picks out a different value for the parameter as relevant. (...) Under those circumstances it might be appropriate to say that there is no single value of the standard of taste parameter that is pragmatically relevant.” (Kölbel 2008b, 20)

<sup>35</sup> Clearly, the latter condition does not follow from the former. Even if there were no pragmatically determined value for some parameter, it would not follow that we are entitled to assess the assertion relative to the value that, say, suits our preferences. One natural thing we may say is that in such a situation the assertion cannot be properly assessed for accuracy or that it is inaccurate. Thus, these two conditions are necessary for an initial characterization of the purported phenomenon of pragmatic freedom.

<sup>36</sup> The application principle that most resembles the principles presented in the main text is found in Kölbel (2009, 397), where the following principle is introduced:

A population  $P$  uses a particular language  $L$  just if:

for every sentence  $s$  of  $L$  and for every person  $S$ , an utterance of  $s$  in a context  $c$  counts as **correct by  $S$ 's lights** in  $P$  iff the content  $L$  assigns to  $s$  in  $c$  is true at the world of  $c$  and the standard of  $S$  in  $c$ .

In turn, in a much earlier paper, Kölbel (2003, 70) formulates the truth relativist correctness conditions of beliefs as follows:

It is a mistake to believe a proposition that is not true in one's own perspective.

According to Kölbel (2009, 387-399), the upshot of these principles is that assertions of propositions about matters of personal taste can be assessed relative to any standard whatsoever. On his view, since there are many standards relative to which we can assess assertions for accuracy, “there is not just one notion of correctness of utterances for sentences expressing propositions concerning matters of taste, but there are many” (Kölbel 2009, 387). Kölbel (2009, 388) even suggests that for some purposes we may need to restrict our notion of correctness to the notion of *accuracy by the utterer’s own standard*. A natural way of understanding these remarks is by seeing accuracy either as a dyadic notion relating assertions and standards (or, alternatively, perspectives) or as several structurally complex monadic notions obtained from this dyadic notion by fixing a particular standard (e.g. *accurate by a’s standard*, *accurate by b’s standard*, etc.) or by establishing a condition on it (e.g. we can restrict our attention to the notion of *accuracy by the utterer’s own standard*).

One last important feature of Kölbel’s proposal is how he conceives of the ordinary monadic truth predicate from the object language. According to him (2008a; 2008c, 251-252; 2012), there are two ordinary monadic notions this predicate could express: a substantive one that is linked to the concept of *objectivity* (i.e. the notion that correspondence theorists have talked about) and a deflationist one that is exhausted by some linguistic properties like satisfying the *Equivalence Schema* and being a *de-nominalizer* (i.e. a predicate that turns a noun referring to a proposition into a sentence expressing an equivalent proposition). The substantive notion has the properties that characterize the deflationist one plus some others, and so all substantive truths would be deflationist truths but not vice versa. When we predicate ordinary truth of a proposition about matters of personal taste, the predicated truth would be the deflationist one. This truth notion would have, then, different extensions (sets of propositions) relative to different standards of taste in the circumstances. Let us point now to a drawback that this proposal, unlike the theories of the first type, has.

The truth notion ordinarily predicated of a proposition deserving a relativist treatment would be the monadic deflationist one. Accordingly, we would expect the relative accuracy notion involved in our ordinary assessments of the assertions and

belief tokens having such a proposition as content to derive from it.<sup>37</sup> But Kölbel provides us with no reason for deriving a relative rather than an absolutist accuracy or inaccuracy property from the truth or untruth of an asserted or believed proposition about matters of personal taste. A non-indexical contextualist view that takes the taste standard of the speaker (believer) as the contextually relevant one agrees with the relativist view defined by TR1 and TR2 on how to assess propositions for truth and disagrees with it only on how to assess assertions for accuracy. Kölbel explains such different accuracy assessments in terms of a difference in the pragmatics endorsed by each view, without ever talking about a difference in how each view conceives of certain contents and their truth or untruth. As we shall explain in the next chapter, this explanation, as it stands, is insufficient: a relativist needs to attribute some distinctive feature to ordinary truth (i.e. a feature that a non-indexical contextualist does not attribute to it) that explains the relativity of accuracy.

As we saw, the first type of proposals single out a feature that plays that role, namely the assessment sensitivity of ordinary truth. There would be contents, in particular propositions, whose extension (a truth-value would be the particular extension of a proposition) is relative to the context of the assessor, insofar as this context fixes some parametric values to assign an extension to these contents. As a result, the ordinary monadic truth notion is also assessment sensitive, given that its extension (i.e. a set of propositions) is relative to the context of assessment. Insofar as monadic accuracy (i.e. the notion that would be implicit in our disagreement and retraction judgments) is explained in terms of how monadic truth gets an extension, it is assessment sensitive as well. At the theoretical metalinguistic level, non-monadic notions of truth and accuracy would account for the assessment sensitivity of the ordinary monadic truth and accuracy notions.

In turn, Kölbel's view is *in principle* compatible with taking the (ordinary and technical) truth notions countenanced by truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism as being the same. That is, despite the possible acceptance of *Truth and accuracy<sub>1</sub>* (i.e. an (actual) assertion/belief token is accurate iff the

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<sup>37</sup> As we explain in the next chapter, we cannot derive a relativist accuracy notion from a non-monadic and assessment insensitive truth notion. Be that as it may, as we shall see next, Kölbel's proposal is *in principle* compatible with taking truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism as working with the same monadic and non-monadic truth notions.

asserted/believed proposition is true),<sup>38</sup> Kölbel does not identify a feature that truth would have that would lead to a relativization of accuracy. Our pragmatic principles could account for the way we assess certain assertions without appealing to some distinctively relativist –as opposed to non-indexical contextualist- view on truth.

To be sure, it can be argued that the difference between the approach advocated by Kölbel and the theories of the first type is terminological. After all, even though Kölbel does not talk about a notion of assessment sensitive truth, he could be seen – insofar as he intends to relativize accuracy- as taking the ordinary truth predicate to express such a notion, and so as taking the phenomenon of pragmatic freedom he does talk about as an expression of the assessment sensitivity of the language. On this understanding of Kölbel’s view, he does not ultimately hold that truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism make use of the same type of contents and truth notions. Similar remarks can be made concerning Lasersohn’s (2005) proposal.

I believe that, at least in the case of Kölbel’s view, we have reason to reject this interpretation. As shall see in detail in the next chapter, there is reason to think that Kölbel only makes use of a dyadic notion of accuracy or several monadic ones obtained from it by fixing one of its *relata*.<sup>39</sup> None of these accuracy notions can be seen as assessment sensitive or something alike. Be that as it may, I am not here concerned with arguing for the incompatibility between Kölbel’s view and the proposals appealing to the notion of assessment sensitivity, but just for the thesis that only the framework provided by the latter views explains relative accuracy in terms of content and truth. In the next chapter we shall see why relative accuracy should be explained in this way.

### 2.2.2. Peter Lasersohn’s proposal

Also based on Kaplan’s framework, Peter Lasersohn (2005) defends a view on predicates of personal taste that is similar to Kölbel’s but mainly differs from it in two features: (i) it includes judges (i.e. individuals playing the role of judges) instead

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<sup>38</sup> As we explained in the introduction, Kölbel could vindicate this principle by assuming that in this biconditional the hidden standard variable of the accuracy predicate always takes the same value as the standard parameter determining the extension of the monadic truth predicate.

<sup>39</sup> In the next chapter we shall explain and criticize an unorthodox proposal by Kölbel (2008c) on how to understand the relation between truth and accuracy, a proposal according to which Kölbel’s non-monadic technical truth notion is, for purely semantic purposes, grounded on an independent pre-theoretical notion of assertion and belief token correctness.

of taste standards in the indices and circumstances of evaluation, alongside worlds and times<sup>40</sup> (accordingly, the contents of declarative sentences in context are functions from ordered triples  $\langle w, t, j \rangle$  of a world, a time and an individual to truth-values), and (ii) it conceives of contexts as purely technical devices (sequences of parametric values) that consist of a judge, an agent, a world and a time. Contexts, so understood, determine a judge, a world and a time as relevant for truth assessments in a purely technical sense.

Lasersohn (2005, 669) makes use of a technical notion of context according to which a context is an abstract object (a sequence of parametric values) that may not represent a concrete situation where a sentence or proposition might be used. According to him, in the case of common utterances of simple declarative sentences containing predicates of personal taste, the situation of utterance (i.e. the context of use understood as a concrete situation) does not pragmatically determine a judge and so a context in the technical sense of the term. As a result, speakers would normally assess personal taste claims for accuracy taking themselves as judges (in Lasersohn's informal terminology, according to their own perspective). Thus, Lasersohn (2005) also appeals to an alleged phenomenon of pragmatic freedom in his account of relative accuracy. Since he, in addition, does not single out a feature that relativists but not non-indexical contextualists attribute to truth, his proposal is subject to basically the same critical observations we just made concerning Kölbel's view.

For our immediate purposes, features (i) and (ii) of Lasersohn's (2005) view do not constitute a significant difference with respect to Kölbel's proposal. However, we should note that there is reason to prefer a framework that does not have them. As we shall explain in chapter 8, a relativist should reject (i) because including individuals instead of other type of parametric values (e.g. standards of taste) in the indices and circumstances of evaluation yields assessments of certain sentences that contravene the retraction data. In turn, (ii) contravenes the common and natural understanding of contexts either as concrete situations of use or assessment or as representations of such situations. This, I believe, unnecessarily complicates the intuitive understanding of the practical significance of a formal semantics (i.e. of how the semantics is meant to account for and yield predictions concerning language

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<sup>40</sup> Unlike Kölbel (2009), Lasersohn (2005) includes a time in the indices and circumstances. This is just a difference in the chosen way of presenting their views on predicates of personal taste. As Kölbel (2009, 383-384) points out, he leaves times aside because he is not concerned there about arguing for a view on tense.

usage) and gives rise to an idle purely technical notion of contextual relevance of an index or circumstance. These drawbacks may be aggravated by the fact that Lasersohn (2005), unlike Kölbel, does not formulate semantic application principles. Besides, as we argue in the present chapter and the next, we should conceive of truth relativism in terms of the notion of assessment sensitivity, which is spelled out by taking contexts to be possible concrete situations.

Another significant feature of Lasersohn's (2005, 670-674) proposal is his classification of assertive utterances of simple sentences containing predicates of personal taste (or, more generally, uses of such sentences) in *autocentric* and *exocentric*. On his view, these assertions are usually autocentric, which means that one correctly takes oneself as the judge (i.e. one adopts an autocentric perspective) to assess these assertions as well as their contents. These are the cases that motivate his relativist proposal. Exocentric assertions, in turn, would be such that there is a salient judge (or group of judges) other than oneself that is relevant for truth and accuracy assessments. These assertions would not result in a relativization of accuracy: there would be, for anyone, just one correct way of assessing such an assertion.<sup>41</sup> On an alternative view, like Stephenson's (2007, 499-500) and MacFarlane's (2014, 155-156), the assertions that Lasersohn treats as exocentric simply require an indexical contextualist treatment according to which the relevant judge(s) or standard endorsed by her (them) is built into the asserted proposition. One reason that can be adduced for this latter approach and against Lasersohn's (2005) is a consideration of theoretical simplicity: on Lasersohn's view, unlike on the alternative approach, belief should be taken as a triadic relation between subjects, propositions and contexts (in its technical understanding, according to which a context determines a judge)<sup>42</sup> instead of as a dyadic relation between subjects and propositions. This is a *prima facie* reason against Lasersohn classification of a range of assertive utterances in autocentric and exocentric.

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<sup>41</sup> An example Lasersohn (2005, 672) gives of an exocentric use is the following. Suppose that John is telling Mary how their two-year-old son Bill enjoyed a trip to the amusement park. In the following conversation John gives "fun" an exocentric use according to which Bill is the judge:

Mary: How did Bill like the rides?

John: Well, the merry-go-round was fun, but the water slide was a little too scary.

<sup>42</sup> Since in assessing one single proposition about matters of personal taste one could adopt an autocentric or exocentric perspective, one could believe such a proposition relative to a context where one is the judge and not believe it relative to another context where someone else is the judge.

To close this subsection, it is worth pointing out that recently Lasersohn (2013) has endorsed a different framework akin to MacFarlane's, i.e. a framework that appeals to the notion of context of assessment. Be that as it may, he argues (2013, 139-143) that once we reject non-indexical contextualist views introducing non-standard parameters in the circumstances based on the fact that they fail to account for a range of disagreements and give rise to a divorce between truth and accuracy (i.e. they allow us to say that an actual assertion of a true/false proposition is inaccurate/accurate), we can consider his earlier proposal as equivalent to one that appeals to the notion of assessment sensitivity. I believe that Lasersohn (2013) rejects these non-indexical contextualist views too rashly: we already gave some reasons for not being too concerned about the just-mentioned divorce in the first chapter and in the second part of this thesis we are going to put into question the relativist description of the relevant disagreements and retractions.

### **2.3. Third type of view**

The views of the third type do not appeal to contexts of assessment or mention a phenomenon of pragmatic freedom but treat relative accuracy simply as following from the non-standard parameter neutrality (i.e. neutrality with respect to a parameter other than the world or time parameter) of certain contents. Accordingly, they ignore the possibility of non-indexical contextualist views introducing non-standard parameters in the circumstances of evaluation, and so provide no explanation of the relativity of accuracy.

#### **2.3.1. Tamina Stephenson's proposal**

Tamina Stephenson's (2007) view on predicates of personal taste and epistemic modals is based on Lasersohn's (2005) proposal. Stephenson makes some changes to Lasersohn's view on predicates of personal taste and extends his framework to account for our use of epistemic modals. Let us see how she does these two things.

Regarding Stephenson's view on predicates of personal taste, she (Stephenson 2007, 498-499) holds that there is a disanalogy between these predicates and epistemic modals: whereas the former would allow for apparent exocentric uses, the

latter would not allow for them. In order to explain this difference, Stephenson, unlike the vast majority of truth relativists, treats predicates of personal taste as dyadic, while offering a usual relativist account of epistemic modals according to which they do not come with some non-obvious hidden argument place. When a predicate of personal taste like “tasty” is applied without a specification of who the person or group playing the role of a judge is, there would be two possible underlying forms for this predication. One form deploys a null (hidden) referential pronoun that refers to a contextually salient individual or group and so gives rise to an indexical contextualist treatment of the predicate. Such applications of the predicate can express different propositions across contexts (concrete situations) even if the sentence used is free of other indexically context-sensitive expressions (i.e. expressions whose contribution to propositional content can vary with the context of use). These cases correspond to the ones Lasersohn would wrongly class as exocentric. The other form exhibits a silent non-referential nominal item  $PRO_j$  as the second argument of the predicate.  $PRO_j$  is initialized by the judge of the context (technically understood) and demands a relativist treatment of the predicate. At any context (understood either as a concrete situation or as a purely technical device) the sentences ‘Mutton is tasty  $PRO_j$ ’ and ‘Mutton is not tasty  $PRO_j$ ’ express contradictory judge-neutral propositions whose assertions are to be autocentrically assessed.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Stephenson (2007, 500) does not take expressions like “for John” or “to John” as they occur in “Mutton is tasty to/for John” to be operators that shift a parametric value in the indices/circumstances: in such cases the predicate of personal taste would simply take an overtly expressed nominal phrase as its second argument.

On the other hand, Stephenson (2007, 502) holds that in the case of unembedded epistemic modals all uses are autocentric and so deserve a relativist treatment. One would always assess the propositions expressed in context by sentences containing an unembedded epistemic modal, as well as their assertions, taking oneself as the judge. The particular feature of the judge that is relevant for such assessments is her knowledge, more precisely the set of epistemic alternatives (for Stephenson sets of

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<sup>43</sup> Notice that on Lasersohn’s (2005) view, unlike on Stephenson’s (2007), different assertions of a single judge-neutral proposition can be assessed either in a relativist or non-relativist way. This feature of Lasersohn’s view squares well with seeing truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism as not countenancing different types of contents.

world/times pairs) that are compatible with her knowledge.<sup>44</sup> For instance, relative to a context (technically understood) the proposition expressed by means of a sentence ‘It *might* be that *S*’ (e.g. “The treasure *might* be under the palm tree”) is true iff the relevant possibility (e.g. the treasure being under the palm tree) obtains in at least one open epistemic alternative, whereas the proposition expressed by means of a sentence ‘It *must* be that *S*’ (e.g. “The treasure *must* be under the palm tree”) is true iff the relevant possibility obtains in all these alternatives.

For our purposes, the most significant difference between Stephenson’s view and Lasersohn’s (2005) is that Stephenson mentions no phenomenon of pragmatic freedom in her account of relative accuracy. Since she does not appeal to contexts of assessment either, relative accuracy is treated as simply following from the judge-neutrality of certain contents. As we have already suggested, there is reason to prefer a proposal that appeals to contexts of assessment to a view like Stephenson’s.

The theories of the first type give us a simple explanation of relative accuracy in terms of truth. Ordinary monadic truth is assessment sensitive, i.e. it has an extension (a set of propositions) relative to a context of assessment. Accordingly, when monadic accuracy is explained by how monadic truth gets an extension, the former comes out as assessment sensitive as well. To be sure, at the metalinguistic theoretical level we account for the assessment sensitivity of these notions by means of theoretical non-monadic truth and accuracy notions. On Stephenson’s view, in turn, there is no identifiable feature that ordinary (or technical) truth has that explains why the accuracy of certain assertions and belief tokens is relative; rather, it is simply assumed that when truth or untruth is autocentrically predicated (i.e. when one takes oneself as a judge in order to assess judge-neutral propositions for truth), accuracy or inaccuracy is autocentrically predicated as well. And this amounts to ignore the possibility of a non-indexical contextualist treatment of predicates of personal taste and epistemic modals according to which truth is autocentrically predicated (i.e. one takes oneself as a judge in order to assess judge-neutral propositions for truth) but accuracy or inaccuracy is once and for all determined by the context (concrete situation) of use (e.g. the relevant judge for accuracy

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<sup>44</sup> The set of epistemic alternatives of an individual is a subset of her doxastic alternatives, that is the alternatives left open by what she believes. Despite the fact that there is no universally accepted account of what knowledge is, it is generally accepted that what is known is also believed.

assessments can be taken to be the agent of this context).<sup>45</sup> This is a drawback of Stephenson’s proposal in comparison to the theories of the first type.

In another respect, in chapters 7 and 8 I will offer reasons why a relativist should, unlike Stephenson (2007), take *information states* and *taste standards* rather than judges as the relevant parametric values for respectively dealing with epistemic modals and predicates of personal taste.

### 2.3.2. Mark Richard’s proposal

Richard (2004, 2008) proposes a relativist view on gradable adjectives, knowledge ascriptions and predicates of personal taste.<sup>46,47</sup> According to him (2004 226-227; 2008, 103-106), the contents of predicates are notions, whereas the content of declarative sentences are structured propositions (ordered n-tuples) that have as constitutive parts the notions expressed by the predicates contained in the sentence. The notions expressed by predicates subject to a relativist treatment do not vary across the contexts in which they are used but, due to their vagueness, they are not associated with a property or have an extension independently of context.<sup>48</sup> In context, these notions are fleshed out so that the predicates that express them are associated with a property and get an extension. Depending on the type of predicate involved, the contextual process of completion is different: whereas the extension and property associated with “rich” would be determined in context by a process of accommodation and negotiation, other predicates like “tasty” would be resolved –as we are going to see in chapter 8- by an appeal to our preferences or values. Accordingly, the property and extension associated with a vague notion can vary across contexts.

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<sup>45</sup> To be sure, there could be reasons to think that such a non-indexical contextualist view does not represent a legitimate possibility, but these reasons are non-obvious and should be made clear. As I pointed out in the introduction, I am not convinced by the general (i.e. not linked to particular cases subject to a relativist treatment) reasons so far presented against non-indexical contextualist views that introduce some parameter over and above the world parameter.

<sup>46</sup> Predicates of personal taste like “tasty” are also gradable adjectives: something could be more or less tasty. However, for reasons that will be seen in chapter 8, they exhibit some peculiar features that make them different from other gradable adjectives (e.g. “rich” and “flat”).

<sup>47</sup> It is worth pointing out that on Richard’s (2008, 131) view, truth may turn out not to be a proper dimension of evaluation for the propositions expressed by means of using these expressions. This would happen when one is tolerant of opinions that are inconsistent with the ones one has and so is not willing to simply reject them. Truth, in such circumstances, would *give out*.

<sup>48</sup> Richard (2008) understands contexts as contexts of use. However, as we shall see, in order to vindicate his remarks concerning disagreement we arguably need to think of the context that fixes the property and extension associated with a notion as the context of assessment.

Now, if different properties are associated with a predicate in different contexts, what prevents Richard from being an indexical contextualist (or a content relativist, if we understand contexts as contexts of assessment)? The answer is that these properties are not constitutive parts of the propositions that are the contents of sentences and the objects of assertion and belief.<sup>49</sup> This explains why two people respectively uttering, say, “Mutton is tasty” and “Mutton is not tasty” in different contexts where the single notion expressed by “tasty” is completed in different ways, would be asserting (believing) contradictory propositions that can both be true relative to these different contexts: a proposition deserving a relativist treatment is true at a context iff the properties resulting from completing vague notions belong to the objects these notions are applied to. According to this, “tasty” can be differently completed so that in one context it is associated with a property that mutton has while in another it is associated with a property that mutton does not have.<sup>50</sup> Thus, a natural way to semantically spell out Richard’s view (2008) is to say that a context fleshes out a notion deserving a relativist treatment by fixing a value (e.g. a given standard or a *perspective*) for a special parameter in the circumstances of evaluation. This notion, as well as the propositions that contain it, would be neutral with respect to this parameter.

Richard (2004, 2008) does not appeal to the notion of context of assessment or the notion of pragmatic freedom. Besides, he (2008, 92) claims that the semantic features of the expressions deserving a relativist treatment depend on the context in which they are *used*. However, he (2008, 126-132; 2011) is after an account of a strong variant of disagreement involving preclusion of joint accuracy, i.e. a form of disagreement that non-indexical contextualism about the expressions being considered cannot vindicate. In this regard, we could see his notion of *perspective*<sup>51</sup>,

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<sup>49</sup> However, we should not –using John Perry’s (1986) distinction between a thought or utterance *being about*  $x$  (i.e.  $x$  is part of the content expressed) or *concerning*  $x$  (i.e.  $x$  is included in the circumstance of evaluation that the context of use fixes as relevant)- say that for Richard a notion in context *concerns* a property. If we did this, we would be suggesting that Richard’s view is as a form of non-indexical contextualism. That is why I chose to talk about a notion being *associated* with a property at a context.

<sup>50</sup> It is worth pointing out that for Richard the monadic truth notion expressed by “true” can also be fleshed out differently in different contexts where truth is predicated of a single proposition involving a notion subject to a relativist treatment. As a result, for Richard all propositions that instantiate the *Equivalence Schema* (i.e. the proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ ) are true in every context.

<sup>51</sup> Richard (2008, 129) tentatively characterizes a perspective as an idealization of someone’s evaluative dispositions that, together with a world, determines an at least partial assignment of truth-values to propositions deserving a relativist treatment. Insofar as they are idealizations, perspectives

as it is specifically used in his semantics for predicates of personal taste (Richard 2008, 136-145), as playing a role similar to the one played by contexts of assessment or the phenomenon of pragmatic freedom: perspectives would not only determine different assignments of truth-values but also different accuracy assessments. But insofar as Richard (2008, 136-145) treats perspectives as parametric values in the circumstances of evaluation alongside possible worlds, it is not clear how they could possibly play this role. We could take the perspective of the asserter (believer) as the one always relevant for assessing an assertion (belief token) for accuracy, in which case accuracy would be absolute. This points to the fact that if we want Richard's notion of perspective to play the role of accounting for relative accuracy, we need to flesh it out somehow. But if we used the notion of context of assessment to flesh it out, that is if we took the relevant perspective for assessing a relativist proposition to be fixed by the context of assessment, the notion of assessment sensitivity would be the one ultimately playing the explanatory role. Besides, Richard talks about perspectives only in the case of predicates of personal taste. With respect to knowledge ascriptions and gradable adjectives like "rich," he (2004, 2008, 89-124, 166-176) just says that they have an extension relative to a standard (i.e. a standard of knowledge or wealth) fixed by the context at which they are used.

In sum, since Richard does not appeal to contexts of assessment or something alike, his proposal is subject to the same objection as Stephenson's (2007) is. Once we contemplate the possibility of non-indexical contextualist views introducing non-standard parameters in the circumstances, Richard's proposal fails to single out a particular feature that certain propositions and their truth or untruth have that leads to the relativization of accuracy.

#### **2.4. Comparing the different types of view: a summary**

I have classified six of the main truth relativist proposals depending on how they conceive of relative accuracy. Relative accuracy has been seen as a consequence of the assessment sensitivity of truth, as a result of a phenomenon we may call "pragmatic freedom" or simply as following from the non-standard parameter

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are meant to have a minimal coherence. As Richard acknowledges, this is a preliminary characterization that would have to be further worked out.

neutrality (i.e. neutrality with respect to a parameter other than the world and time parameters) of certain contents.

We found that the proposals belonging to the second and third type, unlike those belonging to the first type, cannot explain relative accuracy only in terms of truth. Concerning the second kind of proposals, their attempt to account for relative accuracy just by means of an alleged phenomenon of pragmatic freedom leaves open the possibility that non-indexical contextualism and truth relativism about an expression countenance the same type of contents and truth notions. As a result, these proposals do not identify a feature that truth has that explains the relativity of accuracy. As we shall explain in the next chapter, there is reason to explain relative accuracy in terms of a feature of certain contents and their truth or untruth.

Similarly, once we bear in mind the possibility of non-standard forms of non-indexical contextualism, the theories of the third type also fail to single out a feature of relativist propositions and their truth or untruth that makes relative the accuracy of the assertions and belief tokens having such propositions as contents. The mere neutrality of these propositions with respect to a special parameter cannot be such a feature, since both truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism accept such neutral contents.<sup>52</sup> As we explained, the proposals belonging to the first type single out a feature that plays this role in the derivation of accuracy from truth: the assessment sensitivity of truth, which is inseparable from the assessment sensitivity of at least some propositions truth is predicated of.

Many of the criticisms that have been leveled against truth relativism try to show that we cannot make sense of the practice of making assertions and forming beliefs once accuracy is relativized. In the next chapter I argue that the relativist can hope to answer this sort of criticisms if she takes the truth notion present in her favored account of assertion (belief) to be assessment sensitive. This becomes clear once we properly acknowledge the truth-derived nature of accuracy. Accordingly, as we shall explain, the task of making sense of the notion of *truth relative to a context of assessment* turns out to be fundamental for the relativist.

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<sup>52</sup> To be sure, there could be reasons to think that non-indexical contextualist proposals introducing non-standard parameters in the circumstances are not legitimate possible views, but these reasons are non-obvious and should be made clear. As I pointed out in the introduction, I am not convinced by the general (i.e. not linked to particular cases subject to a relativist treatment) reasons so far adduced against non-indexical contextualist views that introduce some parameter over and above the world parameter.

## 3

**Assertion and Assessment Sensitive Truth**

Truth relativism relativizes the accuracy of assertions and belief tokens. In turn, the orthodox understanding of the relation between truth and accuracy takes the latter to derive from the former: an assertion or belief token would be accurate *in virtue* of its content (a proposition) being true or true at the context of assertion. As we saw, proposals appealing to the notion of assessment sensitivity outweigh the others in attributing a feature to truth that explains the relativity of accuracy. Be that as it may, it can be argued that such proposals, like any other form of truth relativism, does not cohere with our practice of making assertions (and, relatedly, forming beliefs). In this chapter I argue that the relativist can hope to answer such line of criticism by taking the truth notion used in her preferred account of assertion to be assessment sensitive. In particular, I consider this issue in connection with an account of assertion in terms of a truth norm or aim. The task left to the relativist shall be to make sense of truth as assessment sensitive by making sense of the notion of *truth relative to a context of assessment*.

The above-mentioned critical line of argument can be stated, following Gareth Evans (1985, 349-350), in terms of the aims and norms of assertion (or belief). Patrick Greenough (2011, 197-198) gives the following preliminary formulation of it:<sup>1</sup> if accuracy is a norm of assertion (derived from the truth norm) in the sense that – insofar as we are being sincere- we must aim to make accurate assertions, what does it mean to aim at accuracy once we assume that in certain areas of discourse there are several ways of assessing assertions for accuracy (i.e. relative to different perspectives or contexts of assessment)? In other words, if accuracy were relative, there would be in those areas of discourse no privileged target to aim at and so, the

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<sup>1</sup> Greenough uses “correctness” instead of “accuracy,” and takes the pre-theoretical notion of correctness as not necessarily truth-related. An assertion or belief token could be incorrect or incorrect for other reasons than the truth-value of its content. This is not the notion of accuracy that we – following most relativist authors- are using. Greenough has methodological doubts about this notion and so there are different assumptions behind Greenough formulation of this problem and mine.

reasoning goes, in saying that we aim at accuracy we would fail to identify an aim. This worry can be also formulated in terms of other truth involving notions present in different accounts of assertion. For instance, if we prefer –following Robert Brandom (1984, 1994)- an account of assertion in terms of a commitment to the truth of an asserted proposition and derivatively to the accuracy of the assertion, we could ask what it means to commit oneself to the accuracy of one’s assertion once we assume that in certain areas of discourse there are several ways of assessing assertions for accuracy.<sup>2</sup> Several authors have made more specific but related criticisms. Among these, I will consider an objection presented by Sven Rosenkranz (2008), which I believe shows what is at stake in relativizing accuracy, and the objection famously raised by Evans (1985, 349-350) and further developed by Manuel García-Carpintero (2008, 141-143), which closely resembles the just given sketchy formulation of the worry. In doing so, I shall focus on the idea that truth is a general aim and norm of assertion (maybe a derivative one), which is arguably implied by all truth involving accounts of assertion.

It is worth making the following two clarifications from the start. First of all, we must stress that there are several accounts of assertion that are not formulated in terms of a truth norm or aim of assertion. For instance, we could define assertion in terms of a knowledge norm (e.g. at a given context, assert something only if at that context you know it), as the expression of a belief, as a proposal to add information to the conversational common ground or as a commitment to the truth of the asserted content.<sup>3</sup> I do not intend to reject any of these accounts in talking about truth as a norm and aim of assertion. More precisely, I will not be concerned with defining what assertion is by identifying its *constitutive* norm(s). For my purposes, it is enough to assume that truth is as *a* norm of assertion, even if it derives from other more basic norms in terms of which assertion should be defined, and even if it could

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<sup>2</sup> Notice that the challenge is specifically addressed to truth relativism and not to non-indexical contextualist views introducing non-standard parameters in the circumstances. A proponent of one of these latter views can say that in asserting a proposition a speaker aims at accuracy as a result of aiming at truth at her context. In the same vein, she can say that the speaker commits herself to the truth of a proposition at her context and, as a result, to the absolute accuracy of her assertion.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Williamson (1996, 2000) is well known for having argued that assertion is constitutively ruled by a knowledge norm. Bernard Williams (2002) has defended an account of assertion as the expression of a belief. Robert Stalnaker (1999, 2005) has proposed an account in terms of a proposal to add information to the common ground. Finally, Robert Brandom (1994) and MacFarlane (2005, 2007) have defended accounts of assertion as a commitment to the truth of the asserted content. MacFarlane (2014, 101-111) has later favored a truth norm account over a commitment account. For an introduction to these accounts and their interrelations see MacFarlane (2011c).

be overridden by other considerations. Arguably, insofar as the legitimacy of an ordinary truth notion is conceded, proponents of the above-mentioned accounts should accept that usually we normatively aim at truth when making sincere assertions.

In the second place, our talk of truth as an aim of assertion is, following most of the literature on this topic, inseparable from talking about truth as a norm of assertion. Truth should be taken as an aim of the social practice of assertion rather than an aim that individuals actually have in making particular assertions. Clearly, an individual can aim to assert a falsehood, but what is at stake is that it is a standing convention or expectation that one aims to assert truths so that, in MacFarlane (2014, 101) words, “in making assertions one represents oneself as aiming to put forward truths.” This way of representing oneself, in turn, is inseparable from Gottlob Frege’s (1980) idea that in asserting one thereby represents (or presents) the asserted proposition as true. We shall return to this idea in the first section.

In this chapter I argue that in order for the relativist to answer the criticisms that were mentioned two paragraphs back she needs to formulate the truth norm and aim of assertion that speakers *expressly* follow in terms of an assessment sensitive truth notion. A more general moral that shall be drawn is that, in order to answer these objections, the relativist should take the truth notion involved in his preferred account of assertion (or belief) to be assessment sensitive.<sup>4</sup> The assessment sensitivity of this notion, in turn, would be accounted for by a non-monadic theoretical truth predicate. This conclusion, together with the ones drawn in the previous chapter, will lead us to single out an important task left to the relativist: to make sense of the notion of *truth relative to a context of assessment* by explaining what it has to do with our ordinary monadic truth notion. This would allow us to see this latter notion as assessment sensitive.

In the first section I argue that the proper way for a relativist to deal with Rosenkranz’s objection –which I think illuminates what it is at stake in relativizing accuracy- is by taking the truth norm of assertion that speakers expressly follow, and take others as expressly following, to involve an assessment sensitive truth notion. In the second one I argue that the relativist should deal with the well-known objection

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<sup>4</sup> In particular, the arguments I present show that a relativist account of assertion in terms of a commitment to truth should take the truth speakers expressly commit themselves to as assessment sensitive.

leveled by Evans and García-Carpintero in the same way. In the third and last section I contend that an important task left to the relativist is to make sense of the notion of *truth relative to a context of assessment*, present two approaches to accomplish this and argue –against MacFarlane (2003, 2014)– that one of them should not be avoided, namely the one consisting in explaining this notion in terms of the ordinary monadic truth notion.

### 3.1. Rosenkranz’s objection and the relation between truth and accuracy

Rosenkranz’s (2008, 228-232) objection focuses on the notion of faultless disagreement. It singles out a difficulty in relativizing accuracy once the faultlessness of a disagreement is acknowledged. For our purposes, we can see this criticism as uncovering the problem of relativizing accuracy in a framework where the notion of assessment sensitive truth does not play a central role in deriving the accuracy or inaccuracy of an assertion.

Rosenkranz (2008) objection is based on the following rationale for deriving accuracy from propositional truth. Insofar as we accept the legitimacy of an ordinary truth notion, we should arguably acknowledge that asserting has the following consequence noticed by Frege (1980): in asserting a proposition one thereby presents it or puts it forward as true.<sup>5,6</sup> As we noticed, this is a feature of assertion that follows from truth being one of its norms. What matters for us now is that, without this feature, the connection between truth and accuracy would be obscure. This feature of assertion is meant to give us a straightforward explanation of why if the proposition asserted is true the assertion is accurate, whereas if this proposition is untrue the assertion is inaccurate. We can derive the accuracy of an (actual) assertion of a proposition  $p$  from  $p$  being true because the assertion presents this proposition as

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<sup>5</sup> Frege (1980) defines assertion as a presentation of a proposition as true. We do not do that here, but just take assertion to have, as one of its consequences, such a presentation. As Frege argues, presenting a proposition as true is not the same as predicating truth of a given proposition. This predication is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for asserting a proposition. We can both express (or have the thought) that a given proposition is true without asserting it and assert a proposition without predicating truth of it.

<sup>6</sup> In turn, according to a standard notion of belief, believing a proposition implies acknowledging it as true. Accordingly, analogous arguments can be run with respect to the accuracy of belief tokens.

true. In turn, in case the asserted proposition were not true, the assertion would be inaccurate, since the proposition would not be as it is presented by the assertion.

Rosenkranz's (2008) objection exploits this rationale for deriving accuracy from truth under the assumption that truth relativism only countenances a non-monadic assessment insensitive truth notion relating propositions to perspectives.<sup>7</sup> Once this assumption is made, the objection to the relativization of accuracy simply runs as follows. At least in typical cases, a relativist should take a speaker *s* who asserts a proposition *p* that is subject to a relativist treatment, as presenting *p* as true relative to *s*'s perspective. Now, insofar as an assertion is accurate iff it presents a proposition as being as it actually is, we should deem the above-mentioned assertion accurate just in case *p* is true relative to *s*'s perspective, otherwise we should judge it to be inaccurate.<sup>8</sup> Hence, there is one perspective that is always relevant to evaluate the assertion for accuracy, namely the one relative to which the assertion presents the proposition as true (in the just considered case *s*'s perspective). And this means that there is no room for relativizing accuracy.<sup>9</sup>

This modified Fregean pattern of accuracy derivation, then, can be endorsed by a non-indexical contextualist introducing some parameter over and above the world parameter in the circumstances of evaluation. In accordance with *Truth and accuracy*<sub>2</sub> (i.e. an assertion/belief token is accurate iff the asserted/believed proposition is true at the context of assertion/belief), such a non-indexical contextualist can say that in asserting a proposition someone thereby presents it as true at her context or perspective, and infer the absolute accuracy or inaccuracy of the assertion from such a relative truth.

The relativist, in turn, should avoid the just stated difficulty in relativizing accuracy by claiming that the truth property an asserter presents a proposition as

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<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, we could formulate the objection talking, instead of perspectives, of contexts of assessment or whatever perspectival parametric values (e.g. standards of taste) we would like to posit in our relativist theory.

<sup>8</sup> In principle, an asserter could also present a proposition as true relative to another perspective than her own, or as true relative to all perspectives. In such a case we could run an entirely analogous argument against the relativization of accuracy. The perspectives always relevant for assessing the assertion would be the ones relative to which the asserter presents the proposition as true.

<sup>9</sup> With regard to the purported cases of faultless disagreement, the outcome is that they turn out to be non-genuine disagreements (in case each party presented a proposition as true relative to a different perspective), non-faultless (if at least one of the parties asserted a proposition that is false relative to the perspective she presents the proposition as true) or both. It is worth noting that Isidora Stojanovic (2007, 696-699) presents an argument against the possibility of a relativist account of faultless disagreement that has some similarities with Rosenkranz's objection. Stojanovic's criticism is based on the assumption that the relativist takes asserters to *intend* the asserted propositions to be evaluated relative to their own perspectives, which would undermine our disagreement intuitions.

having is assessment sensitive. Insofar as the relativist does not include in the circumstances a non-world parameter (e.g. a time parameter) whose value is fixed by the context of use, she can claim that an assertion puts forward a proposition simply as true, while conceiving of ordinary monadic truth (i.e. the notion commonly expressed by the English predicate “true”) as assessment sensitive (i.e. a notion or property whose extension is relative to the context of assessment). Monadic accuracy would be derived from propositional truth using the Fregean pattern of inference introduced at the beginning of this section, and would come out as assessment sensitive just as ordinary truth is. To be sure, non-monadic truth and accuracy predicates and notions from the relativist theory would account for the assessment sensitivity of these monadic notions.<sup>10</sup> Having said this, we must note that this answer is not unproblematic since, as we shall explain in the last section, the relativist still needs to make sense of truth as assessment sensitive.

I would like to address now a possible complaint. It could be claimed that Rosenkranz’s objection depends upon conceiving of accuracy as derived from or grounded on truth, but Kölbel (2008c) has argued for a different way of understanding the relation between truth and accuracy that may allow us to face this objection without relying on the notion of assessment sensitive truth. I will next contend that Kölbel’s understanding of this relation does not constitute a satisfactory alternative.

Kölbel (2008c, 248-252) argues that there is no conceptual link between ordinary monadic truth and his technical truth notion relating propositions to worlds and standards of taste. But this, according to him, does not mean that his view is devoid of practical and philosophical significance. On his view, there is an independent notion of belief correctness (and, derivatively, assertion correctness)

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<sup>10</sup> The relativist could also face Rosenkranz’s objection by claiming that in asserting a proposition a speaker thereby presents it as having a structurally complex truth property that is assessment sensitive. The relativist must follow this option if she –in addition to some parameter whose value is fixed by the context of assessment- includes in the circumstances a non-world parameter whose value is fixed by the context of use and so countenances contents that are neutral with respect to it, which –as we saw in the first chapter- leads to divorce simple truth and simple accuracy. In such a case, the relativist can say that an assertion presents a proposition as true at the context of assertion, and take *truth at the context of assertion* as assessment sensitive (the parametric values relevant for its extension would be fixed by the context of assessment, while the ones fixed by the context of use would not affect its extension). This also makes accuracy monadic and assessment sensitive: an assertion would be accurate iff the proposition asserted is true at the context of assertion. According to this option, speakers have intuitive access to the notion of *truth at the context of assertion*, which would account for the use sensitivity of the simple notion of truth. For the sake of simplicity, we do not consider this possibility in this chapter.

that indirectly confers significance on his non-monadic truth notion. This notion of correctness has to do with our competence in acquiring beliefs and applying concepts. Being competent with a concept requires applying it only under certain conditions and in the case of certain concepts, like the concept of *tastiness*, these conditions would be sensitive to some features of the believer. Accordingly, the same object could be correctly judged as tasty by one believer and correctly judged not to be tasty by another believer, despite both having access to the same evidence. Other concepts, which Kölbel considers to be objective as opposed to non-objective ones like the concept of *tastiness*, would not allow for any variation in their correct application: if one believer applies the concept to an object and another one does not, at least one of them has made a mistake. This notion of correctness could be extended to assertions:

An assertion (or utterance of an assertoric sentence) is correct to the extent to which it is (or would be) correct for the utterer to believe the proposition asserted. (Kölbel 2008c, 250)

Kölbel (2008c, 251) notices that correctness so understood coincides with ordinary monadic truth in the objective range but not in the non-objective range. For instance, if I judge that someone correctly asserts that the sun is a star, I must judge that the asserted proposition is true, but I can judge that someone correctly asserts that mutton is tasty (because it is correct for the utterer to believe the asserted non-objective proposition) despite the asserted proposition not being true (because it is incorrect for me to believe it or assert it).<sup>11</sup> According to this, we cannot identify correctness with ordinary truth. However, Kölbel claims that we can, for semantic purposes, link the former notion to a technical truth notion relating sentences to contexts, worlds and taste standards by means of the following principle (where “True<sup>S</sup>” stands for Kölbel’s sentential truth relation and “@” stands for the actual world):

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<sup>11</sup> As we explained in the previous chapter, Kölbel (2008a, 2013) argues that there are at least two ordinary truth notions, one substantive and one deflationist. The former notion’s extension would be included in the latter’s. Thus, the substantive notion could only be applied in the objective range, where Kölbel assumes that truth and correctness do not come apart, whereas the deflationist one could be applied to the content of any declarative sentence.

An utterance of a sentence  $s$  in a context  $c$  is correct iff  $\text{True}^S(s, c, <@, \text{the standard determined by } c>)$ . (Kölbel 2008c, 250)

Although Kölbel does not provide us with a principle linking correctness to propositional truth, it is clear that for him it would run as follows (with “True<sup>P</sup>” standing for the propositional truth relation):

An assertive utterance of a proposition  $p$  made in  $c$  is correct iff  $\text{True}^P(p, <@, \text{the standard determined by } c>)$ .<sup>12</sup>

The reason Kölbel (2008c, 250) adduces for taking these non-monadic truth predicates as expressing truth notions is the following. In the objective range, the correctness of an assertion coincides with the ordinary truth of the proposition asserted. Thus, Kölbel claims that we can, for strictly semantic purposes, allow ourselves to use technical truth predicates like “True<sup>S</sup>” and “True<sup>P</sup>” that are connected to correctness both in the objective and non-objective range via the principles above stated. For Kölbel, then, his non-monadic truth notion is grounded in an independent pre-theoretical notion of correctness that is responsible for our disagreement intuitions.

Leaving aside the merits or demerits of this view for now, what is clear is that this notion of correctness (accuracy) is not relative but absolute. The standard relevant for assessing an assertion is the one the asserter is subject to, that is the one fixed by the context of use. The resulting position, thus, would be non-indexical contextualist (or, in Kölbel words, moderate relativist).<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Kölbel (2008b, 2009) also claims that the accuracy of assertive utterances of simple sentences containing predicates of personal taste is relative. What he has in mind may be made clear by his claim that there is not just one notion of correctness but lots of them:

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<sup>12</sup> Notice that this principle is equivalent to *Truth and accuracy*<sub>2</sub> (i.e. an assertion/belief token is accurate iff the asserted/believed proposition is true at the context of assertion/belief).

<sup>13</sup> This much is implicitly recognized by Kölbel (2008c, 251), insofar as he acknowledges that a defender of this view should deny that the accuracy of an (actual) assertion amounts to the (ordinary) truth of what was asserted. As we saw in the first chapter, having to deny this is characteristic of non-indexical contextualist views introducing some parameter over and above the world parameter.

There are many ways of evaluating utterances: when Anna says that whale meat is tasty, I can evaluate what she says against her own standard of taste, against my own standard, or against some other person's. Thus, her utterance can be correct on her standard, my standard, someone else's standard. Thus, (...) we should take into account that there is not just one notion of correctness for utterances of sentences expressing propositions concerning matters of taste, but there are many. (Kölbel 2009, 387)

Each one of these notions of correctness (accuracy) is absolute: there is just one legitimate answer to the question of whether an assertion is correct relative to a particular standard. However, each of these notions can be seen as the result of fixing a particular standard for a dyadic correctness notion relating assertions and standards of taste.<sup>14</sup> In particular, the monadic correctness notion having to do with our competence in applying concepts can be seen as the result of introducing a descriptive condition -i.e. *the standard of the speaker (believer)*- on the standard *relatum* of this dyadic notion. The dyadic notion, in turn, can be taken as the result of generalizing the monadic (but structurally complex) notion of *correctness according to the standard of the speaker (believer)*.

There are two important problems with Kölbel's account of relative accuracy that point to the need of positing an assessment sensitive truth notion or property in order to relativize accuracy. First, this way of conceiving of relative accuracy prevents us from vindicating the appearances of genuine disagreement adduced in support of a relativist treatment of a domain of discourse. If A judges the assertion her disagreeing party B makes as inaccurate relative to A's perspective, whereas B judges the assertion A makes as inaccurate relative to B's perspective, we have no reason to see their assessments as being in conflict. These assessments would respectively involve different (structurally complex) monadic notions of accuracy. Then, by means of this way of conceiving of relative accuracy the relativist can only see the relevant apparent disagreements as being of the weak kind classed as *doxastic non-cotenability*. But being able to take these disagreements as genuine disagreements involving *preclusion of joint accuracy* is supposed to be the main

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<sup>14</sup> According to this picture, when we ordinarily talk about correctness we would be using a predicate that expresses either a non-monadic notion or a monadic structurally complex one.

practical difference that truth relativism has with non-indexical contextualism.<sup>15</sup> We can hope to avoid this problem if we ground accuracy on truth and take the truth from which monadic accuracy is derived to be assessment sensitive, and so take monadic accuracy (i.e. the ordinary notion responsible for our disagreement intuitions) to be assessment sensitive as well. This scenario suggests that truth relativism should be characterized as an account of the assessment sensitivity of ordinary truth.

In the second place, I said that we could see Kölbel's view as positing either several accuracy notions or a single non-monadic one. But it is not clear what all these monadic (structurally complex) notions have in common, and so it is equally unclear what this alleged non-monadic accuracy notion amounts to. Kölbel gives some explanation of one of the monadic notions, namely *correctness relative to the speaker's (believer's) perspective*, claiming that it has to do with our competence in applying concepts and acquiring beliefs. Whether this monadic notion has something in common with the others that allows us to view all of them as resulting from fixing different taste standards for the dyadic accuracy notion remains obscure. Again, we can avoid this difficulty by accepting the orthodox grounding connection between truth and accuracy and taking the truth notion from which accuracy is derived to be assessment sensitive. The assessment sensitivity of this notion, in turn, would be accounted for by a non-monadic theoretical truth notion.

In the next section I show that taking assessment sensitive truth as the truth norm and aim of assertion also allows the relativist to provide an answer to Evans's and Carpintero's objection to truth relativism. The task left to the relativist, as we explain in the last section, will be to make sense of the notion of *truth relative to a context of assessment* by explaining what it has to do with the ordinary monadic truth notion.

### 3.2. Evans's and García-Carpintero's objection

Before the contemporary debate over truth relativism took place, Evans (1985, 347-352) identified and criticized a possible treatment of tense that amounts to a

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<sup>15</sup> As MacFarlane (2007, 26-27; 2014, 125-128) explains, truth relativism is meant to vindicate the impression that disagreements about certain matters (e.g. about matters of taste) involve two assertions or belief tokens that cannot be jointly accurate. To be sure, accuracy should be understood here as assessment sensitive.

truth relativist proposal, since it countenances time-neutral (tensed) propositions and relativizes the accuracy (in Evans's words, the correctness) of their assertions. The core of Evans's objection to this proposal is briefly stated in the following passage, where "correct-at-*t*" is meant to express the accuracy notion from a truth relativist theory about tense:

If a theory of reference permits a subject to deduce merely that a particular utterance is now correct, but later incorrect, it cannot assist the subject in deciding what to say, nor in interpreting the remarks made by others. What would he aim at, or take the others to be aiming at? *Maximum* correctness? But of course, if he knew the answer to this question, it would necessarily generate a once-and-for-all assessment of utterances, according to whether or not they meet whatever condition the answer gave. (Evans 1985, 349-350)

The objection can be analyzed in two related parts. First, Evans contends that the proposal gives rise to an unacceptable view on communication, since a subject could not know what to assert and how to interpret others' assertive utterances if accuracy were relative. Accordingly, it would not make sense to take relative accuracy as an aim of assertion. Second, he claims that if the defender of the proposal attempted to specify an aim of assertion, the specified aim would provide a basis for an absolute assessment of assertions as accurate or inaccurate. According to this line of argument, truth relativism is not compatible with taking accuracy as an aim (derived, of course, from the truth aim) of assertion.

Let us consider these two parts, specially the first one, in more detail. Suppose that the accuracy of an assertive utterance of "John is smiling" were relative to the time at which it is assessed. This assertion may be accurate at the time when it is made (in case John is smiling at that time) but may be correctly assessed as inaccurate by an assessor occupying a later time (in case John is not smiling at this later time). The speaker, thus, has no control over how her assertion will be correctly assessed at later times. The first moral Evans draws from this picture is that it gives rise to an unacceptable view on communication. Arguably, speakers generally use sentences like "John is smiling" with the intention to convey information regarding only a particular time. Now, according to relativism about tense, even if the speaker aimed to assert a time-neutral proposition that is true relative to the time she occupies

when making the assertion, an assessor occupying a later time would be entitled to judge the assertion relative to this latter time. But, it seems, insofar as assertions are intentional acts an assessor must assess an assertion for accuracy taking into account the (normative) truth aim the asserter had, whatever this may be.

In turn, the second moral Evans draws is that any correctness aim of assertion the relativist could provide would give rise to an absolute assessment of assertions. This moral is related to the first one: if we cannot make sense of relative accuracy as an aim, whatever correctness aim we may provide to answer the question of what assertions normatively aim at will provide a basis for an absolute assessment of assertions. Despite the relation they have, it will prove useful to treat these morals separately.

Evans's objection is levelled specifically against a relativist treatment of tense, but it purports to provide the basis for a general objection to any proposal that relativizes the accuracy of some assertions. Be that as it may, as it stands, the argument cannot be generalized. Let us consider why this is so with respect to the first moral of Evans's argument and then address the second moral. As we shall see, it is in connection with this latter part of the argument that the relevance of taking assessment sensitive truth as an aim of assertion becomes clear.

In analyzing Evans's objection, García-Carpintero (2008, 141-142) provides further examples that generalize Evans's argument to other cases over and above the case of tense.<sup>16</sup> García-Carpintero (2008, 141-142) considers a possible view according to which sentences containing the first person pronoun express agent-neutral propositions whose assertions' accuracy is relative.<sup>17</sup> On such a view, an assessor is entitled to disregard a speaker's intention to convey information regarding only herself with a sentence such as "I am working," since this sentence is taken to express an agent-neutral content whose assertions are to be evaluated relative to the assessor. Ramiro Caso (2014, 1315), in turn, considers a view that countenances

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<sup>16</sup> García-Carpintero argues for Evans's first moral in a different way from Evans: instead of focusing on the consequences truth relativism has over the production and interpretation of utterances, he argues that the view makes speakers unable to rationally comply with the norms of assertion. The rhetoric question he asks is: "How can I rationally take responsibility for making correct assertions, if the correctness or otherwise of my assertions depends on parameters set at different contexts of evaluation about which I lack whatever information, in ways over which I have no control?" (García-Carpintero 2008, 141)

<sup>17</sup> García-Carpintero actually considers the case of a promise under the assumptions that sentences containing the first person pronoun express agent-neutral contents and the fulfillment conditions of promises is understood in a relativistic way. However, his considerations are meant to also apply to the case of assertion.

location-neutral propositions and relativizes the accuracy of their assertions. On such a view, an assessor is entitled to disregard a speaker's intention to convey information regarding only a particular place with a sentence like "It is raining," since this sentence is taken to express a location-neutral content whose assertions are to be evaluated relative to the location of the assessor.

Be that as it may, these two last cases at most show that Evans's objection is persuasive as applied to other –possibly many other- cases but it does not show that the objection, as it stands, is persuasive as levelled against a relativist treatment of those particular expressions for which contemporary relativists have formulated their proposals, i.e. personal taste, moral and aesthetic predicates, knowledge ascriptions, gradable adjectives, epistemic modals or future contingents. As the evidence adduced by truth relativists suggest, it is just not obvious that a relativist treatment of these expressions clashes with the way we use them. On the contrary, it could be argued, as relativists do, that it is the only proper account of our use of such expressions. The persuasiveness of the first part of Evans's objection is due to the fact that speakers generally intend to convey information regarding only a particular time, agent or location when using sentences such as "John is smiling," "I am working" and "It is raining." Accordingly, in case these sentences expressed time, agent or location neutral contents, we should take speakers who assert these contents to aim at truth relative to a particular time, person (herself) or location, and assess their assertions for accuracy taking into account such an aim. Thus, in order to directly apply this type of objection to the particular cases for which contemporary relativists have formulated their proposals, it should be non-controversial that, for instance, speakers generally intend to convey information regarding only a particular individual, group or taste by means of uttering a sentence like "Mutton is tasty." But this is something relativists should be seen as arguing against, and so it cannot be assumed in an argument against truth relativism.

Now, the reason Evans and García-Carpintero may have for considering their objection as generally applicable is that they see the unacceptable results yielded by a relativist treatment of the cases they consider as stemming from the alleged fact that, on the resulting picture, we cannot say what an asserter should aim at and, relatedly, what the accuracy conditions of her assertion are. This leads us to the second moral of Evans's objection, namely that any correctness aim of assertion the relativist could specify would inevitably result in an absolute assessment of

assertions. As it should be clear by now, I believe that the relativist can face this second part of Evans's objection by claiming that an assertion simply aims at accuracy and that this is an assessment sensitive notion or property. This is an answer that does not give rise to an absolute assessment of assertions and respects the basic intuition that in assessing a speech act for accuracy we should take into account the (normative) truth and accuracy aims the agent had. It would happen that the just stated aims involve assessment sensitive notions or properties.

Greenough (2011, 207-208) and Caso (2014, 1315-1317) offer a different answer to the second part of Evans's objection that we have reason to reject. Both of them, on behalf of the relativist, argue that she can simply answer that an asserter normatively aims at truth and accuracy relative to her perspective or context of assessment. The resulting principle stating the truth aim would run as follows:

P1: An asserter ought to assert only propositions that are true as assessed from the world and perspective (or, alternatively, from the context) she occupies.

How could this answer not yield an absolute assessment of assertions? A moral we can draw from Rosenkranz's objection is that if we take an explicitly relativized non-assessment sensitive truth notion as a norm of assertion expressly followed by speakers, we cannot relativize accuracy. But that seems precisely the kind of truth notion appealed to in P1. Thus, it seems that according to P1, in case the asserted proposition is true as assessed from the world and perspective (context) of the asserter, the assertion is absolutely accurate. More precisely, the word "ought" in P1 arguably receives an absolute reading. In spite of this, Greenough (2010, 208) and mainly Caso (2014, 1315-1317) –based on some distinctions first introduced by MacFarlane (2005a, 315-317; 2014, 102-111)– contend that a principle like P1 provides a satisfactory answer to the second part of Evans's objection. Let us first consider what Caso says.

Caso argues that the relativist should claim that the practice of assertion has two sub-practices: the practice of making assertions and the practice of assessing them. These sub-practices, in Caso's opinion, are guided by different norms, i.e. norms that relativize truth to different perspectives or contexts. P1 would be the norm that guides the making of assertions but not their assessments, which would be guided by

the following principle (where  $w_{c_1}$  is the world of context  $c_1$  and  $P_{c_2}$  is the perspective relevant at context  $c_2$ ):

P2: An assertion of proposition  $p$  made at context  $c_1$  is accurate as assessed from context  $c_2$  iff  $p$  is true at  $\langle w_{c_1}, P_{c_2} \rangle$ .

The resulting picture, in Caso's words, is the following:

In making assertions, the asserter aims to correctness according to her own circumstance. In interpreting the utterances of others, the interpreter presupposes compliance with the norm of assertion (or, at any rate, the intention of complying with it). However, in assessing the assertions of others (or hers at a later time), an assessor does so according to her own circumstance, not the asserter's (or hers at the time of utterance) (Caso 2014, 1315)

According to Caso (2014, 1315), the truth aim of an assertion does not determine the way in which we ought to assess it for accuracy. In spite of this, he claims that the accuracy notion (in Caso's words correctness) implicit in P1 is not ultimately different from the one used in P2. Rather, P1 would be insufficient to determine one notion of accuracy, since it would only concern the production of assertions. But P1 together with P2 would determine a relative notion of accuracy. The impression that P1 gives rise to an absolute accuracy notion would stem from the fact that there is a privilege perspective for the purpose of making an assertion.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 103-111) formulates two truth norms of assertion using an explicitly relativized truth predicate, and there are points in common between Caso's answer and MacFarlane's comments on these norms. For MacFarlane, there is a norm ruling the making of assertions that runs as follows:

(*M*) An agent is permitted to assert proposition  $p$  at context  $c$  only if  $p$  is true as used at  $c$  and assessed from  $c$ .

Given that this norm does not allow us to distinguish truth relativism from non-indexical contextualism, MacFarlane looks for that distinction in the norms each view should accept concerning retraction. Thus, he supplements (*M*) with the following norm:

(*RT*) An agent in context  $c_2$  is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of  $p$  made at  $c_1$  if  $p$  is not true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ .

MacFarlane (2005a, 317-322) also makes a similar distinction, adding to (*M*) an account –based on Brandom (1983)- of the consequences of making an assertion. As we shall see in the next section, we

I have two related objections to this line of response to the second part of Evans's objection. First of all, I believe that, unless we read P1 and P2 as metalinguistic principles meant to account for norms that deploy an assessment sensitive accuracy notion and speakers *expressly* follow, there cannot be one single accuracy notion in play in Caso's proposal. After all, taken at face value the word "ought" in P1 does presuppose a monadic notion of accuracy in terms of which assertions could be absolutely assessed, whereas P2 does deploy a non-monadic accuracy notion relating assertions to contexts of assessment. Thus, if we take these principles at face value, a view that jointly endorses them countenances two unrelated accuracy notions. In turn, if we formulate the accuracy aim or norm of assertion using a single monadic assessment sensitive notion of accuracy derived from an assessment sensitive truth notion we do not face this problem. In asserting we would aim at accuracy, whose assessment sensitivity would be accounted for by non-monadic truth and accuracy notions at the metalinguistic theoretical level. We should clearly distinguish, then, between accuracy and truth as assessment sensitive notions in terms of which we should formulate the norms of assertion that speakers *expressly* follow, and the theoretical non-monadic notions of truth and accuracy that are supposed to account for the assessment sensitivity of the former notions. To be sure, we can attempt to provide a metalinguistic reading of P1 and P2, but that move presupposes that a proper answer to the second part of Evans's objection consists in noting that in making assertions speakers expressly aim at assessment sensitive truth and accuracy.

In the second place, it is not clear how an assessor derives accuracy from truth on Caso's view. Caso's response has the result that the truth aim of assertion does not determine how assessments of assertions for accuracy should be carried out. But an assertion is an intentional act and so its aim should correspond to how a proposition is presented by a felicitous assertion (e.g. as true or as true relative to some perspective or context). And once we accept this and take the truth the asserter (expressly) aims at to be explicitly relational and assessment insensitive, we can hardly avoid drawing the conclusion that accuracy is absolute, as Rosenkranz's

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could make sense of MacFarlane's explicitly relativized norms if we understood them as metalinguistic principles that account for norms deploying an assessment sensitive truth notion. Be that as it may, such an understanding of these explicitly relativized norms does not vindicate Caso's answer to the second part of Evans's objection, but presupposes that the proper answer consists in noting that in making assertions speakers expressly aim at assessment sensitive truth and accuracy.

objection shows. Recall that this objection shows that if the truth notion from which we intend to derive accuracy involves an explicit relativization to particular perspectives/contexts and is assessment insensitive, then using a simple pattern of inference accuracy comes out as absolute. Therefore, Caso owes us an explanation of how accuracy is derived from truth, an explanation we automatically get by taking assessment sensitive truth and accuracy as the norms of assertion that speakers expressly follow.

As I pointed out, Greenough (2011, 207-208) also gives a response to the second part of Evans's objection according to which a principle such as P1 specifies the truth aim of assertion. In order to assuage the worries this answer may generate, Greenough writes:

It is true that an assessment of the form 'From the perspective of B, B did not do anything incorrect in making the assertion that she did' is a once-and-for-all assessment in the sense that this evaluation is absolute –there is no assessment-sensitivity in the meta-language, the language we use to talk about the relativized correctness conditions of assertions. But *that* kind of once-and-for-all answer, unlike the answer 'is correct (simpliciter),' (i.e. 'is correct with respect to all contexts of assessment') is, of course, compatible with Truth Relativism (Greenough 2011, 208).

In light of the considerations made so far, the way in which the explicitly relativized evaluation of an assertion mentioned by Greenough can make sense and be compatible with truth relativism is as a metalinguistic account of an evaluation that deploys a monadic accuracy notion derived from an assessment sensitive truth notion. And we could try to make sense of a principle that states the truth or accuracy aim of assertion in an explicitly relativized way by claiming that it does not directly formulate this aim as asserters conceive of it but metalinguistically accounts for it. Be that as it may, this option may mislead the relativist into taking speakers as expressly aiming at truth and accuracy relative to a perspective/context of assessment and so make her face the problems we have considered. For this reason, it may be better for the relativist to formulate the truth aim or norm in terms of a truth notion that is not explicitly relativized to a perspective or context of assessment, and then account for its purported assessment sensitivity at the level of the metalanguage.

However, as we shall note in the next section, an explicitly relativized formulation of the truth norm(s) of assertion accepted by the relativist proves useful to empirically test her theory.

### 3.3. The task left to the truth relativist

Many objections made to truth relativism have to do with how to conceive of assertion (and, to a lesser degree, belief) in a truth relativist framework. I have argued that there is reason to think that the relativist can answer some of these objections by taking the truth notion involved in her account of assertion (or belief)<sup>19</sup> to be assessment sensitive. This constitutes a significant advantage that Macfarlane's type of relativist framework has over the other frameworks we considered in the previous chapter. But it is contentious whether we understand our talk of assessment sensitive truth and, relatedly, whether our ordinary monadic truth notion is assessment sensitive, as MacFarlane contends. In order to see truth as assessment sensitive we need to make sure that we understand what is meant by the doubly relativized metalinguistic predicate "true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ " that would account for the assessment sensitivity of the ordinary monadic truth notion.<sup>20</sup> But, as MacFarlane (2005a, 312; 2014, 97) points out, it is not clear that the notion of truth admits of a relativization to assessors. MacFarlane, following Jack Meiland (1977), states the question as a dilemma:

If "true" as it occurs in "true for X" is just the ordinary, nonrelative truth predicate, then it is unclear what "for X" adds.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, if the occurrence of "true" in "true for X" is like the "cat" in "cattle" –an orthographic, not a semantic, part- then the relativist needs to explain what

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<sup>19</sup> What we said about the truth aim or norm of assertion and its impact on our prospects of relativizing assertion accuracy can be applied to the case of belief tokens with some modifications. For instance, instead of talking about presenting a proposition as true we should talk about acknowledging a proposition as true.

<sup>20</sup> The question, thus, is to vindicate at the same time the meaningfulness of this doubly relativized metalinguistic predicate and the intelligibility of the notion of assessment sensitive truth that is said to be our ordinary truth notion.

<sup>21</sup> As MacFarlane (2014, 97) points out, "for X" could be used to state what the opinion of X about something is, but this is not the understanding of this expression that the relativist is after.

“true-for-X” means and what it has to do with truth, as ordinarily conceived. (MacFarlane 2005a, 312; 2014, 97)

Hence, the proposed relativist answer to the objections we considered faces a further challenge: to make sense of ordinary truth as assessment sensitive, which amounts to making sense of the non-monadic truth notion relating propositions to contexts of assessment.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see in this section, there are at least two different approaches to deal with this question.

To begin with, some authors (Cappelen and Hawthorne, 2009, 2011; Montminy, 2009; Soames, 2011) contend that any theory that introduces a technical non-monadic truth predicate has to make sense of it by *defining* or *characterizing* it in terms of ordinary monadic truth. According to this approach, the relativist should provide an explanation by using the ordinary truth predicate –which, we can assume, expresses a notion we already grasp to some extent- of what she says by means of using her non-monadic one. This, in turn, would allow us to conceive of ordinary truth as assessment sensitive. Martin Montminy (2009, 349-352) elaborates this point.<sup>23</sup>

Montminy argues that there should be a way of paraphrasing what we say by using MacFarlane’s non-monadic truth predicate by means of using our ordinary one. Otherwise, the relativist can be accused of changing the subject; she can be accused, for instance, of ultimately talking about what *seems true to an assessor* (under appropriate conditions, if you like), contrary to her initial purpose. The requirement of providing such a linking explanation may not be, as Montminy (2009, 350) stresses, a requirement to provide a *reductive definition* using the ordinary notion of what we say by using the non-monadic one. To conceptually connect the two notions and preserve the subject matter it is arguably sufficient to provide truth-conditionally equivalent paraphrases using the ordinary notion of what we say by using the non-monadic one. And we can find examples of such ways of linking a non-monadic

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<sup>22</sup> As we explained, MacFarlane’s non-monadic truth notion is a triadic notion relating propositions to contexts of use and contexts of assessment. For the sake of simplicity, I shall often not mention contexts of use when talking about the relativist non-monadic truth notion. It is generally assumed that the context of use fixes the relevant world and, if we accept time-neutral propositions, the relevant time for truth assessments.

<sup>23</sup> It is worth pointing out that Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009) assume that truth relativism cannot define or characterize non-monadic truth in terms of ordinary truth, and so claim that relativists must reject the explanatory priority of ordinary monadic truth. MacFarlane (2011b) argues that this is not so. However, he does not adopt the characterization approach.

truth notion with the monadic ordinary one that seem pretty natural. For instance, we can link the dyadic truth notion relating propositions to possible worlds to our ordinary truth notion by taking *truth* as extensionally equivalent to *truth in the actual world*,<sup>24</sup> and taking our talk of truth in non-actual worlds as having at least an extensional correlate in our ordinary counterfactual talk about truth: to say that something (a proposition) is *true/untrue/false in (non-actual) world w* is equivalent to say that it would be *true/untrue/false* if such and such were the case.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, if one accepts time-neutral propositions, one may hold that saying that a proposition *p* is *true/untrue/false at time t* is equivalent to saying that *p* is *true/untrue/false* (if *t* is the present time), saying that *p* was *true/untrue/false when t occurred* (if *t* is in the past) or saying that *p* will be *true/untrue/false when t occurs* (if *t* is in the future).

According to this line of reasoning, if there were no such a conceptual connection between the ordinary truth predicate and the relativist non-monadic one, there might be no compelling reason to consider the latter as expressing a truth notion and so no compelling reason to consider our ordinary truth notion as assessment sensitive. In other words, such an absence would suggest that MacFarlane's truth relativism fails to account, by means of its non-monadic truth predicate, for the assessment sensitivity of our ordinary truth notion. At most, the relativist could be seen as talking about some other notion whose significance –e.g. its alleged role in the relativist's account of assertion, disagreement and retraction– would be dubious.

Before turning to the second approach, it is worth noting that any theory that makes use of a non-monadic truth predicate to account for an aspect of our use of the monadic ordinary one would face the challenge to provide a linking explanation. In particular, non-indexical contextualist views –especially those including non-

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth pointing out that, as some remarks by Scott Soames (2011, 127) show, we should use a non-rigid description such as “the actual world” in stating this equivalence, and not a directly referential expression like the name “@,” which refers to the actual world. The reason is that a proposition that is true at @ has the property of *being true at @* in every possible world, and so *being true at @* is an essential property of any proposition that has it, unlike the property admittedly expressed by “true.” Therefore, even though these properties are coextensive at @, they are different properties.

<sup>25</sup> Alternatively, Soames (2011, 124) proposes to understand possible worlds as properties and to take the truth of a proposition *p* at (non-actual world) *w* as the fact that *p* would be true were the universe to instantiate *w*.

standard parameters in the circumstances of evaluation<sup>26</sup>- would face this challenge, since they also countenance two such predicates: a monadic use sensitive one taken to be the ordinary one, and a dyadic predicate expressing a notion that relates propositions to contexts of use. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, this challenge is more pressing for the relativist than for the non-indexical contextualist.

The second approach to making sense of the relativist non-monadic truth predicate is the one MacFarlane (2005a, 312-322; 2014, 97-101) endorses. MacFarlane, following Michael Dummett (1959, 1978), proposes to illuminate his triadic truth notion by describing the role it plays in a broader theory of language use; more precisely, by describing its connection to the speech act of assertion. The idea is that, even though a definition of the triadic truth predicate that merely fixes its extension –together with the extension of the monadic one from the object language– over a class of sentences/propositions and contexts does not give us the grasp of the notion it expresses that we are looking for, we could have such a grasp if we combined this definition with an account of the different illocutionary forces -e.g. assertoric force- with which one can put forth a sentence. In order to illuminate this point, MacFarlane asks us to consider the following analogy taken from Dummett (1959). Consider the concept of winning in chess. One could have a definition of “winning in chess” that states under which configurations of pieces on the chess board White or Black counts as winning. But if one had only this knowledge one would miss a crucial aspect of the concept of winning in chess. According to Dummett, the missed aspect is that winning in chess is what we aim at in playing this game. In the same way, a definition that merely fixes the extension of a truth predicate would not allow someone who does not know the *significance* of applying it to sentences and propositions to understand the concept it expresses. On Dummett’s opinion, what we need to understand the truth notion present in the classical Tarskian truth definition is the information that truth is an aim of assertion. Similarly, on MacFarlane’s view, in order to understand his triadic truth notion we need to somehow connect it to our practice of making assertions.

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<sup>26</sup> As we noticed in the first chapter, possible world semantics and temporal semantics are understood along non-indexical contextualist lines, and such semantics, as we just explained, have natural ways of explaining the sense of their non-monadic truth predicates in terms of the ordinary monadic one.

MacFarlane (2005a, 2007, 2014) proposes two ways of doing this. In the first place, he (2014, 102-111) provides what he considers two constitutive truth norms of assertion, the truth norm for making and the truth norm for retracting assertions:<sup>27</sup>

(*M*) An agent is permitted to assert proposition  $p$  at context  $c$  only if  $p$  is true as used at  $c$  and assessed from  $c$ .

(*RT*) An agent in context  $c_2$  is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of  $p$  made at  $c_1$  if  $p$  is not true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ .<sup>28</sup>

Together, these norms of assertion yield –because of (*RT*)– different predictions concerning language usage from the ones non-indexical contextualism yields.

In the second place, MacFarlane (2005a, 318-321; 2007, 27-29) extends Brandom's account of assertion as a commitment to truth to make room for contexts of assessment. On MacFarlane's opinion, we can account for the act of asserting an assessment sensitive proposition  $p$  by means of commitment  $W_R$ , and possibly also by means of commitments  $V_R$  and  $R_R$ :

$W_R$ : Commitment to withdrawing the assertion (in any future context  $c_2$ ) if  $p$  is shown to be untrue as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ .

$V_R$ : Commitment to vindicating the assertion when it is appropriately challenged, by providing grounds for the truth of  $p$  as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$  (the context at which the challenge is being met), or perhaps by deferring to someone else who can.

$R_R$ : Commitment to accepting responsibility (at any future context  $c_2$ ) if on the basis of this assertion someone else takes  $p$  to be true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ , and it proves not to be.

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<sup>27</sup> As you recall, Caso appeals to similar principles to respond to the second part of Evans's objection.

<sup>28</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 110-111) also considers a rejection norm, which can play a role analogous to (*RT*) in telling apart truth relativism from non-indexical contextualism:

(*RJ*) An agent in context  $c_2$  is permitted to reject an assertion of  $p$  made at  $c_1$  if  $p$  is not true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ .

Despite considering (*RJ*) as a valid rule that can be used to account for certain disagreements conferring support on truth relativism, MacFarlane (2014) chooses to focus mainly on (*M*) and (*RT*). It should be noted that there is an important difference between (*RT*) and (*RJ*): the former states a *requirement*, since it necessarily concerns an inaccurate assertion made by the agent herself, whereas the latter merely *permits* a rejection under certain circumstances.

MacFarlane assumes that this second approach is sufficient to make sense of his non-monadic truth notion. I agree that this approach is important to confer empirical significance on truth relativism, but I believe that the first approach should not be dismissed and points to a more fundamental task that the relativist needs to address. I close this section by explaining why I think this is so.

One could think that MacFarlane's two strategies to implement the second approach (i.e. by means of the norms ( $M$ ) and ( $RT$ ) and the commitments  $W_R$ ,  $V_R$  and  $R_R$ ) imply that in asserting a proposition someone presents it as true relative to a particular pair of contexts, being this triadic truth assessment insensitive. But Rosenkranz's objection shows us that we cannot say this if we intend to relativize accuracy.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, one may think that the second approach is misguided. This reasoning is too hasty. As we suggested at the end of the last section, we should understand principles that, like the ones just presented, state the truth norms or commitments of assertion in an explicitly relativized way as metalinguistic principles that account for a practice of assertion that is *expressly* ruled by norms or commitments deploying an assessment sensitive truth notion. Be that as it may, in order to understand these principles as accounts of such assessment sensitive truth norms or commitments, we could need an explanatory link between the ordinary truth notion and the theoretical non-monadic one, i.e. a link that gives us an explanatory reading of these principles in terms of our ordinary truth predicate. Otherwise, in conferring empirical significance on truth relativism via the above stated principles we could still be seen as empirically testing a theory about a notion such as *seems true to an assessor* (under appropriate conditions, if you like), contrary to what is intended.

This possibility reveals a significant difference between the Tarskian truth notion that Dummett intends to make sense of and the truth notion that MacFarlane intends to make sense of. In Dummett's example, it is assumed that the only knowledge the Tarskian semantic definition gives us is how the extension of the defined predicate is recursively fixed, and the added information takes us to a post-semantic level. In doing so, the semantically defined notion is arguably identified

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<sup>29</sup> If we chose to say that in making an assertion one thereby presents a proposition as true relative to a particular pair of contexts, being this triadic truth assessment insensitive, we would render contexts of assessment idle wheels in our theory: an assertion would be accurate just in case the asserted proposition is true relative to this pair of contexts. Contexts of assessment are meant to be practically significant insofar as they yield a relative notion of accuracy.

with ordinary truth.<sup>30</sup> In turn, MacFarlane's definition of truth at a pair of contexts already lies at a post-semantic level, and as such it is meant to tell us not just how an extension for this notion is fixed, but also how assertions are to be assessed for accuracy. Once we have this information, it is obvious how to extend a traditional account of assertion in terms of a truth norm or commitment in order to make room for contexts of assessment: we just need to assume that the truth notion present in this account is assessment sensitive, and make explicit its dependence on a context of assessment. Thus, if we have doubts about the meaningfulness of MacFarlane's triadic truth predicate, these doubts can hardly be assuaged by principles like (M) and (RT), or  $W_R$ ,  $V_R$  and  $R_R$ . An obvious strategy to assuage these doubts is to give some explanation of the non-monadic truth notion in terms of the ordinary one.

Besides, the ordinary truth notion and the post-semantic non-monadic one MacFarlane introduces are not to be independently grasped, since the latter notion is meant to account for the assessment sensitivity of the former one; and we can explain, in terms of ordinary truth, the non-monadic truth notions used in the paradigmatic cases of possible world semantics and temporal semantics. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect there to be a way of explaining the sense of the relativist non-monadic truth predicate in terms of the ordinary one; and in case the relativist were unable to provide such an explanation, doubt would be casted on the meaningfulness of the former predicate. This also provides motivation for the relativist to explore the definitional approach. According to all this, even if by helping us to test the relativist theory, MacFarlane's approach helps us to make sense of its non-monadic truth notion, there is reason not to dismiss Montminy's approach. As we shall see, the relativist can offer at least a schema for characterizing her non-monadic truth notion in terms of monadic truth.

In the next chapter I present a dilemma that Paul Boghossian (2011, pp. 60-66) levels against truth relativism. For our purposes, this dilemma spots a peculiar difficulty that truth relativism, as opposed to non-indexical contextualism, faces to provide an illuminating explanation of its non-monadic truth notion in terms of ordinary monadic truth. An explanation that makes sense of the former notion should provide an answer to this dilemma.

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<sup>30</sup> To be sure, Tarski (1956) defines a predicate 'Truth in L' that can only be applied to the sentences of a particular language L. Still, if one is willing to talk of propositions, one can see the definition as telling us under which conditions the content of each sentence of L is simply true.

## 4

**The Linking Problem and its Possible Solutions**

MacFarlane's (2005, 2007, 2011, 2014) relativist framework posits two truth notions that would correspond to two properties: a monadic assessment sensitive one allegedly expressed in English by "true," and a triadic one expressed by a metalinguistic predicate from the relativist theory. The first notion is monadic insofar as its extension is a set of propositions and not a set of ordered n-tuples,<sup>1</sup> whereas it is assessment sensitive because it gets an extension relative to some parametric values in the circumstances of evaluation (e.g. a standard of taste) that are fixed by the context of assessment instead of by the context of use. The triadic truth notion, in turn, relates propositions to contexts of use and contexts of assessment and is meant to account for the assessment sensitivity of the monadic notion. On this framework, the accuracy (i.e. correctness in a truth-derived sense) of assertions and belief tokens having assessment sensitive propositions as contents is itself assessment sensitive. Insofar as we need a context of assessment in addition to a context of use (i.e. a context where a proposition is asserted or merely accepted) to assess for truth an assessment sensitive proposition, we also need it to assess for accuracy an assertion or belief token having such a proposition as content.

Relativist views should not be confused with non-indexical contextualist views that introduce the same parameters in the circumstances (e.g. a world and a taste standard parameter) but take the values for all these parameters to be fixed by the context of use. These latter views posit a monadic (exclusively) use sensitive truth notion that would be commonly expressed in English by "true," and a dyadic one that relates propositions to contexts of use. As a result, for such views accuracy is not assessment sensitive: the context where an assertion is made or belief token held fixes all parametric values for assessing for truth the proposition asserted or believed, and so how the assertion or belief token is to be assessed does not vary across

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<sup>1</sup> I shall only talk of propositional truth, leaving sentential truth aside. We take the former notion to be explanatorily prior: we consider that a sentence in context is true in virtue of expressing a true proposition.

assessors. Thus, the practical difference between these relativist and non-indexical contextualist views lies at the level of monadic accuracy assessments, but not at the level of monadic truth assessments.<sup>2</sup> However, this difference would stem from a difference in how these views conceive of truth.

As we argued in the last chapter, in order to make sense of their respective post-semantic and technical non-monadic truth notions (i.e. to show that they are truth notions),<sup>3</sup> these proposals should at least provide some *definition* or *characterization* of them in terms of the ordinary monadic truth notion.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the present chapter is to determine which such definitions each view can appeal to, and especially which one could help the relativist to answer a dilemma that Paul Boghossian (2011) presents to her. As we shall see, an illuminating characterization of the relativist non-monadic truth notion in terms of the monadic one must provide an answer to this dilemma. The linking problem is the question of providing such an explanatory link between these notions. Thus, I will be mainly concerned with truth relativism, and will only make side comments on non-indexical contextualism.

It is worth noting that there will always be room for discussion as to what the nature of our ordinary truth notion is or as to whether there is only one ordinary truth notion.<sup>5</sup> Be that as it may, on the assumption that there is an ordinary truth notion from which an assessor derives an accuracy notion, it proves useful for an evaluation of truth relativism to determine which linking explanation this view should accept.

In the first section I argue that the relativist faces a peculiar difficulty to provide an explanation of her non-monadic truth notion in terms of monadic truth that is made evident by a criticism Boghossian (2011, 60-66) levels against her view. More precisely, I present a dilemma for truth relativism that Boghossian derives from, what he calls, the *argument from (perspectival) immersion*. An illuminating

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<sup>2</sup> On MacFarlane's view, in assessing a proposition for truth one's context is at the same time the context where this proposition is used and the context from which any such use is assessed. That is, the context of use coincides with the context of assessment when it comes to monadic truth assessments.

<sup>3</sup> As we saw, in making sense of her post-semantic and non-monadic truth notion, the relativist would also make sense of ordinary monadic truth as assessment sensitive. The former notion is meant to account for the assessment sensitivity of the latter notion.

<sup>4</sup> Such a definition, as Montminy (2009, 350) suggests and we pointed out in the last chapter, may not be in principle a *reductive definition*. To conceptually connect the two truth notions and preserve the subject matter, it may be sufficient to provide an illuminating means of constructing extensionally equivalent paraphrases, by using our ordinary truth predicate, of what we say by using the non-monadic truth predicate. Since "definition" could be understood as "reductive definition", I often speak of *characterization* or *explanation* instead of *definition*.

<sup>5</sup> For views positing more than one ordinary truth notion see, for instance, Wright (1992) and Kölbel (2008a).

definition of the relativist non-monadic truth notion in terms of ordinary truth has to provide an answer to this dilemma. In the second section I argue that under –what I take to be- the default understanding of the metalanguage of her theory, the relativist cannot provide an explanatory link between his non-monadic truth notion and ordinary truth that allows her to answer Boghossian’s dilemma. I also contend in this section that the non-indexical contextualist introducing a non-standard parameter can, under the default understanding of her metalanguage, provide an acceptable explanatory link between her non-monadic truth notion and ordinary truth. In the third section I present an alternative interpretation of the relativist metalanguage that could allow the relativist to provide a linking explanation that solves Boghossian’s dilemma, and take notice of one further linking explanation that could work for non-indexical contextualism. Finally, in the fourth section, I present an objection to the linking explanation based on the just-mentioned understanding of the relativist metalanguage and comment on how it could be answered.

#### **4.1. A dilemma for truth relativism**

Boghossian (2011, 61-62) motivates his dilemma by means of an argument he calls the “argument from (perspectival) immersion.” This argument is a development of an objection made by Richard (2008, 132) to the notion of faultless disagreement as a phenomenon lending support to truth relativism. As we shall see, for Boghossian (2011, 65) it is not the conclusion of this argument (i.e. the impossibility of faultless disagreements) in itself what is problematic for the relativist, but the just mentioned dilemma that he extracts from the whole argument.

According to Richard’s reasoning, we cannot make sense of the notion of faultless disagreement if we take accuracy –and so the notion of fault- to be perspectival or, according to our preferred relativist framework, assessment sensitive. From any context of assessment, two people asserting (believing) assessment sensitive propositions that are inconsistent with each other (in the sense of not being both true at any single circumstance of evaluation) and use sensitive at most with

respect to the world, cannot be both fault free;<sup>6</sup> from any such context, if one assertion (belief token) is accurate the other is inaccurate, which means that at least one of the disagreeing parties should be judged to be at fault because of asserting (believing) an untrue proposition.<sup>7</sup> Thus, for a rational committed assessor, that is a rational assessor occupying a context of assessment that determines a truth-value or lack thereof for the asserted or believed propositions (as used at the context of the asserter or believer), there cannot be faultless disagreements. And from this we could conclude that there cannot be faultless disagreements, since such an assessor –who could be any of us- cannot claim that there are. Boghossian offers the following presentation of this argument, and derives a dilemma from it that the relativist would face (for simplicity’s sake we assume, with Boghossian, that propositions are use sensitive only with respect to the world and both A and B occupy the actual world):<sup>8</sup>

- 1) A judges that *p* and B judges that *not-p*.
- 2) Proposition *p* is true relative to A’s context of assessment and proposition *not-p* is true relative to B’s context of assessment.
- 3) If *p* is true relative to A’s context of assessment, then the proposition that *it is true that p* is true relative to A’s context of assessment (i.e. instances of the *Equivalence Schema* are true within a context of assessment).
- 4) If A judges that *it is true that p* then A must, on pain of incoherence, judge that *it is false that not-p*.
- 5) If A judges that *it is false that not-p* then A must, on pain of incoherence, consider that anyone who judges that *not-p* (e.g. B) is making a mistake (i.e. her judgment is inaccurate).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As we saw in the first chapter, if two people occupying the same world sincerely asserted propositions that are neutral with respect to a non-world parameter that is initialized by the context of use, the mutual inconsistency of these propositions would not be a sufficient condition for disagreement understood as involving the preclusion of the joint accuracy of two judgments or assertions (as assessed from a single context) –i.e. as a phenomenon that can lend support to truth relativism as opposed to non-indexical contextualism.

<sup>7</sup> Recall that, as MacFarlane (2014, 226) makes clear, an assertion is accurate if and only if the asserted proposition is true as used at the context of the assertion and assessed from ours, in any other case it is inaccurate.

<sup>8</sup> I have introduced some changes to Boghossian’s presentation of this argument to fit my expository purposes. In particular, I talk of *contexts of assessment* where he talks of *perspectives*. Given the two assumptions just stated, I can afford ignoring the relativity of truth to the context of use.

<sup>9</sup> As we shall see, a non-indexical contextualist view introducing a non-world parameter in the circumstances is not affected by the dilemma we are about to present, since –as long as this view does not take the value of other parameters as dependent on the context of assessment- it rejects 5.

- 6) Therefore, A should judge that B is making a mistake and so cannot regard the disagreement with B as faultless.
- 7) Therefore, the disagreement between A and B is not faultless.

According to Boghossian (2011, 65), it is not the conclusion 7, in itself, what is supposed to be problematic for the relativist. After all, a relativist like MacFarlane is happy to concede that there cannot be faultless disagreements once the notion of fault at stake (i.e. the notion of inaccuracy) is taken to be –as the intended notion of fault from the argument from immersion is- the one responsible for our intuitions of disagreement,<sup>10</sup> since for such a relativist this notion is assessment sensitive. And, as MacFarlane (2014, 133-136) makes clear, a relativist can make this concession and at the same time vindicate a different notion of faultless disagreement that appeals to a theoretical non-monadic notion of accuracy to explain the faultlessness of a disagreement (i.e. the parties to the disagreement would be fault free in the sense that the assertion each one makes, or the token belief each one holds, is accurate relative to their respective contexts of assessment). What is meant to create trouble for the relativist is the following dilemma that Boghossian (2011, 63) derives from the whole argument from immersion:

*Dilemma:* Either we regard the argument from immersion as sound or we find a way to reject it. If we regard it as sound, then not only does truth relativism not seem intuitively a relativist view but also it is unstable. But on the other hand, there is no way to reject the argument without giving up some essential tenet of truth relativism. Hence, truth relativism is unstable.

To be sure, in order to make sense of this dilemma, we must make, following Boghossian (2011, 63), one further assumption:

*Committed Relativism:* The theorist proposing a truth relativist treatment of  $p$  can be a committed thinker regarding  $p$  (i.e. it can happen that from her

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<sup>10</sup>Accordingly, a disagreement should be understood here as involving the preclusion of the joint accuracy of two judgments or assertions (as assessed from a single context), and not just the impossibility of each disagreeing party to adopt the other party's doxastic attitude without changing her mind. As we saw in the first chapter, MacFarlane (2014, 121-122, 125-128) calls the first type of disagreement "preclusion of joint accuracy," and the second "doxastic non-cotenability."

context  $p$  is true, false or lacks a truth-value and the assertions of  $p$  are accurate or inaccurate).

This seems not to be a problematic assumption. Relativists see themselves as providing an account of what is for anyone, including them, to judge that  $p$ . Let us explain the just stated dilemma, especially in connection with MacFarlane's proposal, and then see why it would reveal a special difficulty to provide an illuminating definition or characterization of the relativist non-monadic truth notion in terms of the ordinary monadic one.

With respect to the first horn of the dilemma, Boghossian (2011, 63-64) argues that in case a committed relativist endorsed the argument from immersion, she would have to concede that there is only one correct position to take about a given topic subject to a relativist treatment (e.g. whether mutton is tasty). This is implied by the fact that she is committed to judge anyone having a view that is incompatible with her own view to be mistaken (inaccurate). But then, the argument goes, not only does the view the relativist ends up holding not seem relativist, but also it seems indistinguishable from absolutism.

The problem would have to do not only with the *credentials* of truth relativism but also with an instability in this view. Truth relativism about, say, predicates of personal taste, holds that the truth or untruth of the propositions commonly expressed by simple sentences containing these predicates is relative to, say, standards of taste. But the committed relativist who thinks that, for instance, mutton is tasty, must hold that anyone who thinks otherwise about mutton, even if she is judging impeccably from her own different taste standard, is mistaken (i.e. her judgment is inaccurate). So, what could be the committed relativist's attitude towards such a different standard of taste? The answer is that she must regard it as mistaken, given that she judges anyone who makes impeccable assessments according to it to be mistaken. That is, she must see this standard as wrongly classing some things as tasty and others as not tasty. Thus, it seems that the committed relativist cannot say that the truth-value of the propositions expressed by means of these sentences can vary across contexts of assessment fixing different taste standards, since she considers that there is only one right standard of taste relative to which assessments for monadic truth should be made. According to Boghossian, then, intolerance about others' taste standards threatens to destabilize the central relativist tenet that certain propositions

can have different truth-values relative to contexts of assessment fixing different standards of taste. Analogous remarks could be made about a relativist treatment of other expressions than predicates of personal taste.

To be sure, it could be argued that the first horn of the dilemma rests on the assumption that the monadic notion of rightness is absolute (i.e. assessment insensitive), but on MacFarlane's view this notion should be seen as assessment sensitive precisely as a result of the assessment sensitivity of monadic accuracy, which in turn is the result of the assessment sensitivity of ordinary truth. That is, on this view, the *right* value of a parameter in the circumstances that is initialized by the context of assessment can vary with the context of assessment. Therefore, the argument goes, considering a particular parametric value (e.g. a standard of taste) as the only right one is compatible with endorsing truth relativism, which is a theory that would account, by means of a non-monadic truth notion, for the assessment sensitivity of ordinary truth.

This answer, as it stands, is insufficient to answer the dilemma's first horn. It is natural to take the relativist theory's metalanguage used to talk about *truth relative to contexts of assessment*, as providing an absolute and so neutral point of view from which no assessment sensitive distinction between right and wrong parametric values initialized by the context of assessment is made. Under this default understanding of the relativist metalanguage, from the point of view of this language all contexts of assessment fixing different parametric values are equally appropriate standpoints for making assessments for ordinary truth. But a committed assessor could not occupy this point of view, insofar as she takes a certain value for each parameter that would be initialized by the context of assessment (e.g. a given standard of taste) as the only right one for making such assessments.<sup>11</sup> In other words, assuming the default understanding of the relativist metalanguage, the commitment of the assessor implies her confinement to a perspective jointly provided by the object language and her context, from which she cannot coherently state the relativist view. Thus, the committed relativist needs to say something else in order to answer the just presented instability charge and so make proper sense of the non-monadic truth predicate she uses to relate propositions to contexts of assessment fixing possibly different parametric values. As these comments suggest and we shall see in the third section,

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, a committed relativist about "tasty" should take all other taste standards than her own as wrongly classing some things as tasty and others as not tasty.

she should introduce some form of assessment sensitivity in her understanding of her metalanguage, and so deny that this language provides an absolute standpoint. But let us leave this issue aside for now and turn to the second horn of the dilemma.

The scenario resulting from the relativist's acceptance of the argument from immersion gives her reason to reject it. But there is no way for her to reject this argument. Rejecting 1 does not make sense, since it just presents a case of incompatible judgments. 2 and 5 cannot be rejected, since they characterize a case that relativists are committed to accept: 2 presents two contradictory propositions that can be jointly true relative to different contexts of assessment, whereas 5 – together with 2- implies that accuracy is assessment sensitive just as ordinary truth is. 3 seems unquestionable: if  $p$  is true (from a context of assessment), then surely *it is true that  $p$*  is true (from this same context of assessment). We cannot reject 4, since it just states a minimal requirement for coherence: it rules out the possibility of true contradictions. Rejecting the inference to 6 is not an option, since it is definitional that if someone should judge that at least one party to a disagreement is mistaken, she cannot regard the disagreement as faultless (assuming that the notion of fault used in the whole argument is an ordinary monadic one). Finally, as we suggested, there are good reasons for making the inference to 7. But 7, as Boghossian (2011, 65) points out, is not necessary for the dialectic effectiveness of the dilemma. Therefore, the argument goes, truth relativism cannot avoid the instability charge.<sup>12</sup>

Notice that a non-indexical contextualist view that introduces in the circumstances a non-world parameter initialized by the context of use is not subject to this dilemma. As long as this view does not take the value of other parameters as dependent on the context of assessment, it rejects 5 and does not treat accuracy as assessment sensitive. Accordingly, for a proponent of this view someone can be right to assert or believe something untrue, and someone can be wrong to assert or believe something true. An asserted or (innerly) accepted proposition can deserve a different

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<sup>12</sup> The relativist could also try to avoid Boghossian's dilemma by rejecting *Committed Relativism*. That is, she could claim that, from the context occupied by someone who knows the truth of the relativist theory, the propositions subject to a relativist treatment cannot be assessed for monadic truth, and so the assertions of these propositions cannot be assessed for monadic accuracy. According to this, rational speakers who sincerely predicate ordinary truth or untruth of these propositions, or are disposed to do so, need to ignore the truth of the relativist theory. This does not seem to be a plausible answer, insofar as most relativists think of themselves as regular speakers who make regular judgments expressed by means of those object language expressions subject to a relativist treatment (e.g. personal taste predicates, epistemic modals or the verb "know"). In MacFarlane's words: "...committed relativists about some area of discourse will want the conveniences afforded by a disquotational truth predicate when they are engaging in that discourse." (2011b, 442)

truth-value assessment at one's context from the one it deserves at the context of the assertion or acceptance, and the only context that matters to assess for accuracy the assertion or acceptance is the latter context.<sup>13</sup>

To close this section, let us see how the just stated dilemma points to an apparent impossibility faced by the committed relativist to explain the notion of *truth relative to contexts of assessment* in terms of ordinary monadic truth. As we argued in the previous chapter, in order to make sense of the former notion (i.e. to show that it is a truth notion), the relativist should at least provide some illuminating definition or characterization of the former notion in terms of the latter.<sup>14</sup>

Suppose the relativist occupies a context of assessment  $c_1$  where standard of taste  $s$  is in play and there is another context of assessment  $c_2$  where another standard of taste is in play. According to the dilemma's first horn, the monadic assessment sensitive notion of accuracy derived from an allegedly ordinary assessment sensitive notion of truth, leads the committed relativist to take  $s$  as the only right standard for truth assessments, and this threatens to destabilize the basic relativist tenet that truth is relative to contexts of assessment fixing possibly different taste standards. More to the point, according to this horn of the dilemma, a rational subject who sincerely applies the ordinary, monadic and allegedly assessment sensitive truth notion could not see the truth predicate that relates propositions to contexts of assessment fixing possibly different parametric values as expressing a truth notion. The dilemma, then, is based on the apparent impossibility for the committed relativist to make sense, in terms of the ordinary monadic truth notion, of locutions such as "true relative to context of assessment  $c_2$ "<sup>15</sup> and, in a derivative way, "accurate relative to context of assessment  $c_2$ ." Accordingly, the dilemma –in particular its first horn– could be answered by means of some explanation of the sense of such locutions that makes use of our monadic truth notion. And such an explanation amounts to a characterization of the relativist non-monadic truth notion in terms of ordinary

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<sup>13</sup> In Boghossian's (2011, 65) words, the truth norms that such a proposal takes as governing assertion and belief are *tolerant of opposition*: since a subject should assert or believe what is true at her context, I must consider that she is accurate in asserting or believing a use sensitive proposition that is true at her context, even if this proposition is not true at my context.

<sup>14</sup> Such a definition, as Montminy (2009, 350) suggests, may not be in principle a *reductive definition*. Since "definition" could be understood as "reductive definition," I often speak of *characterization* or *explanation* instead of *definition*.

<sup>15</sup> MacFarlane's non-monadic truth notion is a triadic notion relating propositions to contexts of use and contexts of assessment. Be that as it may, as we pointed out, we assume, for simplicity's sake, that propositions are use sensitive only with respect to the world, and this assumption often allows us to ignore the context of use when talking about the relativist non-monadic truth notion.

monadic truth that allows us, at the same time, to see the former notion as a truth notion and the latter one as assessment sensitive.<sup>16</sup>

According to what we have just said, an illuminating definition of the relativist non-monadic truth notion in terms of monadic truth has to provide some answer to Boghossian's dilemma. On the other hand, as we suggested, the pull of this dilemma is due to a default understanding of the metalanguage from the relativist theory. In the next section I explain in more detail what, I think, this understanding is, and argue that under this metalanguage understanding there is, as a matter of fact, no definitional link between ordinary truth and the relativist non-monadic truth notion that allows us to answer Boghossian's dilemma. In the third section we shall consider alternative interpretations of the relativist metalanguage that could help the relativist solve this dilemma. Finally, in the fourth section we shall see that the most promising definitional link is in principle subject, at least in most cases for which truth relativism has been proposed, to an objection whose possible replies should be considered in connection with each of these cases.

#### 4.2. Linking explanations under the default metalanguage interpretation

I take it that the default interpretation of the relativist metalanguage rests on the following two assumptions:

- (1) Actual and (in case we countenanced time-neutral propositions) present contexts constitute, as it were, *equally legitimate standpoints* from which to make assessments for ordinary truth.<sup>17</sup>
- (2) One's understanding of the metalanguage is not dependent on the particular such context one occupies.

According to this interpretation of the relativist metalanguage, despite the assessment sensitivity of truth and accuracy at the level of the object language, the relativist

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<sup>16</sup> Recall, in this regard, that the non-monadic truth notion is meant to account for the assessment sensitivity of the ordinary monadic one.

<sup>17</sup> The restriction to actual contexts is due to the fact that we should privilege the actual world in our assessments for ordinary truth. Similarly, in a framework that countenances time-neutral propositions we should privilege the present time in such assessments.

theory provides an absolute point of view at the level of the metalanguage. As we shall argue in the next section, truth relativism should reject both (1) and (2), since any of these assumptions prevents the view from providing an explanation of non-monadic truth in terms of ordinary monadic truth that solves Boghossian's dilemma. On the other hand, insofar as non-indexical contextualism accepts absolute accuracy, it must accept (1) but, as we shall see, this does not prevent the view from providing an acceptable explanation of its non-monadic truth notion. Let us consider next why truth relativism cannot provide the required explanation once (1) and (2) are jointly endorsed.

There are two strategies for linking a monadic notion or property to a non-monadic –let us say dyadic- one that allow us to characterize one in terms of the other.<sup>18, 19</sup> To begin with, we can either fix one of the *relata* of the dyadic notion or establish a condition on it. This procedure would allow us to explain the dyadic truth notion relating propositions to possible worlds in terms of our ordinary truth notion. Everyday talk about truth concerns the world we inhabit, and so we can view the (monadic but structurally complex) notion of *truth in the actual world* as equivalent to our ordinary monadic truth notion.<sup>20</sup> In turn, we could explain our talk of a proposition being true, untrue or false in non-actual worlds by appealing to our counterfactual talk about truth: to say that a proposition is *true/untrue/false in a non-actual world w* is equivalent to say that it would be *true/untrue/false* if such and such were the case.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, if one accepts time-neutral propositions, one may be willing to see *truth at present* as equivalent to *truth* and take one's talk of a proposition being true, untrue or false at another time *t* as equivalent to either saying

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<sup>18</sup> I talk about a dyadic notion or property for the sake of simplicity. We can make the same points about a monadic notion and a non-monadic one of any adicity.

<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that the provided link, as such, does not tell us which of the notions is taken as explanatorily prior. In principle, we can use the link to characterize any of the two notions in terms of the other. Be that as it may, we are here considering our monadic truth notion as explanatorily prior.

<sup>20</sup> As we explained in the last chapter, Soames (2011, 127) shows that we should use a non-rigid description such as “the actual world” in stating this equivalence, and not a directly referential expression like the name “@,” which refers to the actual world. The reason is that a proposition that is true at @ has the property of *being true at @* in every possible world, and so *being true at @* is an essential property of any proposition that has it, unlike the property admittedly expressed by “true.” Therefore, even though these properties are coextensive at @, they are different properties.

<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, Soames (2011, 124) proposes to understand possible worlds as properties and to take the truth of a proposition *p* at (non-actual world) *w* as the fact that *p* would be true were the universe to instantiate *w*.

that *p* was true/untrue/false when *t* occurred (if *t* is in the past) or saying that *p* will be true/untrue/false when *t* occurs (if *t* is in the future).<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, if the extension of the monadic notion depends on the value of a parameter in the circumstances that corresponds to one of the argument places of the dyadic notion, we can link these notions by means of an operator. As MacFarlane (2011b, 446) suggests, we can use an operator “by *s*” (where *s* could be, for instance, a taste standard, a knowledge standard or an information state) to state the following biconditional that links a non-monadic truth notion to a monadic one: proposition *p* is true relative to *s* iff by *s*, *p* is true. Note that this biconditional should be read as a schema, since in order for it to state something general we must understand “*s*” and “*p*” as schematic letters.

With respect to the first linking strategy, one could think that it is possible for the relativist to take truth at one’s own context of assessment or, better, truth at all contexts of assessment fixing the same parametric values as this context does, as equivalent to truth. After all, from a context of assessment *c* relative to which a proposition *p* is untrue (true), one could not say that *p* is true (untrue) no matter whether one judges that it is *true (untrue) relative to context of assessment c’*.<sup>23</sup> One could then try to provide some explanation that links our talk of a proposition being *true relative to context of assessment c’* to our talk of a proposition being *true*. But under the default metalanguage interpretation resulting from the joint acceptance of (1) and (2) we cannot apply this linking strategy.

According to the default interpretation of the relativist metalanguage, there cannot be a privileged subset of actual and present contexts of assessment, and so one cannot saturate the context of assessment variable of the non-monadic truth predicate to provide an explanatory link between the notion this predicate expresses and ordinary truth. Recall that according to (1) actual and present contexts are taken as equally legitimate truth assessment standpoints, while according to (2) one’s understanding of the metalanguage is not dependent on the particular such context one occupies. As a result, from the metalanguage standpoint, considering one particular subset of such contexts fixing the same parametric values as the only one

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<sup>22</sup> For an analogous reason to the one Soames (2011, 127) presents in connection with possible world semantics, we should use a description like “the present time” instead of a directly referential expression in providing this last linking explanation.

<sup>23</sup> Insofar as the monadic truth notion is assessment sensitive, one is as an assessor constrained to judge that this notion’s extension (a set of propositions) is the one it has at one’s own context of assessment.

relevant for assessing propositions for truth is not only arbitrary but also incompatible with the purpose of relativizing truth.<sup>24</sup> And notice that, for the same reason, this strategy is not available to non-indexical contextualism either.<sup>25</sup>

In turn, using the second linking strategy a relativist could try to provide a linking explanation by means of the following biconditional schema (where  $s_c$  stands for the value that  $c$  fixes for parameter  $s$ ): proposition  $p$  is *true relative to context of assessment*  $c$  iff by  $s_c$ ,  $p$  is *true*.<sup>26</sup> Since the former is a biconditional schema, “ $c$ ” and “ $p$ ” are not taken to respectively name a particular context and a particular proposition but are seen as schematic letters respectively ranging over different contexts of assessment and propositions. In understanding “ $c$ ” in such a way we could hope to avoid the problem found with the first linking strategy: understood as a schema, the previous biconditional would allow us to have a grasp of the link between the different truth notions from an objective point of view that does not favor a particular parametric value and set of contexts of assessment.

However, this schema does not provide a characterization of the relativist’s non-monadic truth notion in terms of monadic truth that helps her answer the first horn of Boghossian’s dilemma. More to the point, the right hand side of this schema does not provide some explanation of how an assessor—in particular, the committed relativist—could take a certain parametric value (e.g. a standard of taste) as the only right one for truth-value assessments without being an absolutist. According to the dilemma’s first horn, a committed relativist would have trouble to accept all instances of this biconditional schema where, say, a different taste standard from the one she endorses is mentioned, given that she is committed to take any such standard as inappropriate for truth-value assessments.

In turn, a non-indexical contextualist introducing in the circumstances a parameter  $s$  can try to make sense of her non-monadic truth notion by means of the following biconditional schema: proposition  $p$  is *true relative to context of use*  $c$  iff

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<sup>24</sup> Assuming that all standards of taste provide equally legitimate truth assessment standpoints, Kölbel (2008c, 248-249) similarly argues that we cannot fix one particular taste standard or set thereof to provide an explanatory link between his non-monadic truth notion and the ordinary one.

<sup>25</sup> To be sure, non-indexical contextualism holds that there is only one context we should consider to assess an assertion for accuracy, namely the context at which the assertion was made. What I am pointing out is that, assuming (1) and (2), this view cannot fix one particular subset of actual and present contexts as relevant for assessing propositions for truth.

<sup>26</sup> For the sake of simplicity, we are ignoring the use sensitivity or assessment sensitivity of truth in connection with other parameters than  $s$ .

by  $s_c$ ,  $p$  is true.<sup>27</sup> Since Boghossian's dilemma is not addressed to non-indexical contextualist views, this attempt to make sense of the non-monadic truth notion introduced by such a view is not subject to the just-mentioned objection.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, we cannot state the truth relativist theory using exclusively the object language with its truth and accuracy notions, but, on the other hand, the default interpretation of the metalanguage resulting from the acceptance of (1) and (2) prevents the committed relativist from providing a definitional link between non-monadic truth and ordinary truth that allows her to answer Boghossian's dilemma.

### **4.3. Linking explanations under an intra-contextual metalanguage interpretation**

There is an alternative interpretation of the metalanguage that may allow the relativist to apply the first linking strategy to solve Boghossian's dilemma. However, as we shall point out in the last section, this move faces a further important challenge.

The relativist could try to make sense of her non-monadic truth notion only from her own context of assessment. That is, she could drop at least assumption (2) and adopt an intra-contextual approach. In order to do this, then, she needs to offer an alternative understanding of her metalanguage. We shall consider two possible linking explanations that attempt to do this; the clear flaw of the first one will guide us to the second better one. As we shall see, whereas the first linking explanation does not require us to also drop assumption (1), the second one does, and despite the first proposal not working for truth relativism, it could work for non-indexical contextualism.

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<sup>27</sup> We are again ignoring the use sensitivity or assessment sensitivity of truth in connection with other parameters than  $s$ .

<sup>28</sup> It is worth mentioning the following possible objection to any application of the second linking strategy to make sense of a non-monadic truth notion. Cappelen and Hawthorne (2011, 459-462) argue that a property or notion whose extension is parameterized is actually non-monadic, despite the sense in which MacFarlane says that ordinary truth is monadic (i.e. its extension at a circumstance of evaluation is a set of propositions and not a set of n-tuples). Thus, since these authors take ordinary truth to be monadic as well as explanatorily prior, they would see the schemas we just considered as non-illuminating. As MacFarlane (2011b, 442) shows, this line of argument is not persuasive. If in order for something to have a monadic property it must not have it in virtue of standing in a relation to something else, there could hardly be a monadic property or notion.

Suppose that an assessment sensitive proposition  $p$  is *true (untrue) relative to context of assessment  $c$*  and *untrue (true) relative to context of assessment  $c'$* . It can be thought that a relativist occupying  $c$  can reason as follows:  $p$  is untrue (true) but it would be true (untrue) if I were in  $c'$ /if I were to assess  $p$  at  $c'$ . Accordingly, as Montminy's (2009, 351) suggests,<sup>29</sup> one could think possible to explain the relativist non-monadic truth notion by taking *truth* to be equivalent to *truth at  $c$*  (one's own context of assessment), and understanding the theoretical talk of a proposition  $p$  being *true (untrue) relative to context of assessment  $c'$*  (a context one does not occupy) as equivalent to the following counterfactual talk where the ordinary monadic truth notion would be used:  $p$  would be *true (untrue)* if I were in  $c'$ / if I were to assess  $p$  at  $c'$ .<sup>30</sup>

But as MacFarlane (2014, 197) makes clear, his proposal is committed to say that –at least in most cases deserving a relativist treatment- as assessed from my context  $c$  the proposition expressed by “ $p$  would be true (untrue) if I were in  $c'$ / if I were to assess  $p$  at  $c'$ ” is false.<sup>31</sup> Except for the case of future contingents, in all the rest of the cases for which truth relativism has been proposed the natural thing for a relativist to say –and what MacFarlane actually says- is that, in a counterfactual like the previous one, the value of the possible world parameter is shifted independently from the parametric value (e.g. a standard of knowledge, a standard of taste or an information state) that is fixed by the context of assessment. Therefore, the antecedent of the previous counterfactual conditional (i.e. “if I were in  $c'$ / if I were to assess  $p$  at  $c'$ ”) should be taken as shifting the world but not the parametric value the context of assessment fixes. As a result, on MacFarlane's view I can say truly from my context of assessment  $c$  that if I were in  $c'$ / if I were to assess  $p$  at  $c'$ , I would come up with the wrong verdict concerning  $p$ 's truth-value or lack thereof.

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<sup>29</sup> Montminy (2009, 351-352) considers this explanation specifically in connection with the case of knowledge ascriptions. He takes it as the most promising linking explanation available to the relativist, but he criticizes it because of contravening speakers' truth-value intuitions. As we shall see, contrary to Montminy's opinion, this explanation does not square well with truth relativism.

<sup>30</sup> It could be argued that it is better to find a more colloquial way of explaining the sense of our metalinguistic talk. It is possible to find other alternative formulations with respect to particular cases by means of describing the relevant features of a context of assessment. For instance, Montminy (2009, 351) proposes the following way of paraphrasing, from a context where a high knowledge standard is in play, our theoretical talk of the proposition that  $S$  knows that  $p$  being true relative to a context of assessment  $c_{low}$  (a context where a low knowledge standard is in play): if the stakes were low and no error possibilities had been mentioned, it would be true that  $S$  knows that  $p$ .

<sup>31</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 197) actually considers the following sentence in connection with the case of knowledge ascriptions: “If the stakes were low and no error possibility had been mentioned, then John's assertion would be true.”

It is worth noticing that this is not just what MacFarlane says but also the natural thing for a relativist to say. In taking truth as assessment sensitive the relativist takes accuracy as assessment sensitive as well: since a context of use alone does not determine a truth-value or lack thereof for an assessment sensitive proposition, we cannot assess for accuracy an assertion or belief token that has such a proposition as content without a context of assessment. Now, if an assertion of a proposition  $p$  made by another person at a context of assessment (and use) from which  $p$  is true is correctly (from my context  $c$ ) assessed by me as inaccurate because of  $p$  being untrue, why should I judge that if I were to occupy  $c'$   $p$  would be true and so I would be right in assessing this proposition as true? This linking explanation, then, conflicts with the way the relativist takes speakers to assess assertions (belief tokens) made (had) at other contexts.

In turn, non-indexical contextualism does not have the same impediment for using this linking explanation, since this approach accepts absolute accuracy. It is open to the non-indexical contextualist to say that, in the same way as I can judge that someone occupying a context  $c'$  correctly assesses  $p$  as true and so accurately asserts or believes  $p$ , I can judge that if I were to occupy  $c'$ ,  $p$  would be true and so I would correctly assess it as true. Thus, the linking explanation suggested by Montminy could work for non-indexical contextualism but not for truth relativism.

Given that we are trying to provide a linking explanation from our own context of assessment  $c$ , it seems clear that we should see *truth* as equivalent to *truth relative to  $c$*  or, better, as equivalent to *truth relative to contexts  $C$*  (all those contexts fixing the same parametric values as the ones our context fixes). The difficulty arises in providing something extensionally equivalent to *truth relative to a context of assessment  $c'$*  (i.e. a context of assessment one does not occupy and that fixes different parametric values from our own) by using our ordinary monadic truth notion. The problem faced by Montminy's linking explanation suggests us that what is needed to apply the first linking strategy is to shift the parametric value(s) fixed by the context of assessment in a way that is compatible with how speakers are supposed to assess assertions of (tokens beliefs in) assessment sensitive propositions.

One could try to make sense of our talk of a proposition  $p$  being *true relative to a context of assessment  $c'$*  by appealing to the following counterfactual talk:  $p$  would be true if context  $c'$  were a *right* context of assessment, that is if the parametric values (e.g. a standard of taste) that  $c'$  (as a context of assessment) fixes were the

*right* ones. According to this proposal, a relativist should privilege her own context of assessment by considering it as a right one, and claim that her view is still relativist insofar as it considers that it is not possible in certain areas to occupy an absolute point of view concerning what is right.<sup>32, 33</sup> This amounts to dropping, in addition to assumption (2) (i.e. one's understanding of the metalanguage is not dependent on the particular actual and present context one occupies), assumption (1) (i.e. actual and present contexts constitute equally legitimate truth assessment standpoints).

Notice that (i) in conferring a privileged status on our context, the proposal is in principle compatible with correctly assessing (from our context) as inaccurate the assertions made by others as well as the counterfactual ones made by us at contexts from which the asserted propositions are to be assessed as true: since those contexts of assessment are not right and from our right context the propositions asserted are untrue, the just-mentioned assertions are inaccurate (and, of course, the same goes for belief tokens); and (ii) in shifting the status of a context of assessment in the antecedent of a counterfactual conditional, we also shift the parametric values to be fixed by the context of assessment.<sup>34</sup>

This constitutes a tentative understanding of the metalanguage of the relativist that could provide an explanation of non-monadic truth that solves Boghossian's dilemma. But there is an important challenge lurking: to give some explanation of what the *rightness* of a context of assessment amounts to. The notion of *right context of assessment* itself should be seen as assessment sensitive (i.e. what is *right* can vary across contexts of assessment), and so the proposal, as it stands, is non-illuminating.<sup>35</sup> The prospects of an explanation of what a right context of assessment

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<sup>32</sup> Barry C. Smith (2010) can be seen as adopting this approach. I am thankful to him for useful discussions and suggestions on how a relativist should make sense of her non-monadic truth notion.

<sup>33</sup> Another way of avoiding the provision of an absolute standpoint is to posit infinite levels of higher order relativity (i.e. to posit an infinite number of assessment sensitive metalanguages), so that whether an assessment sensitive proposition is true relative to a particular context of assessment is itself relative to a context of assessment. The reason why I do not consider this move here is that at each of these infinite levels of truth relativization, the relativist has to figure out whether she can treat, from her context, all contexts of assessment as equally legitimate. Consequently, this option finds the same problems as the linking proposals we have considered find to explain the relativist non-monadic truth notion. As we shall see in brief, the linking explanation just presented also introduces assessment sensitivity at the level of the metalanguage, though in a different way.

<sup>34</sup> It could be claimed that the antecedent of such a counterfactual conditional also shifts the world. If that were the case, there would be a way of jointly shifting the world and the parametric value(s) fixed by the context of assessment. It is not necessary for my purposes to take a stance on this question.

<sup>35</sup> Note that the assessment sensitivity of this notion makes our metalanguage assessment sensitive in a different way from the one mentioned in footnote 33. According to our preferred linking explanation,

is should be considered in a case-by-case basis, that is with respect to particular notions of assessment sensitivity resulting from considering different features of contexts of assessment (e.g. the taste or knowledge standard endorsed by the assessor) that are meant to have an impact on how to assess propositions, assertions and belief tokens. As we shall see in the second part of this dissertation, whereas in the case of future contingents we can give a straightforward explanation of what a right context of assessment is, in the rest of the cases we cannot do this.

We shall resume the problem of making sense of the notion of *right context of assessment* in the next section and throughout the following chapters. To conclude this section let us consider how this metalanguage understanding could be used to apply the second linking strategy, though in a clearly derivate way. Recall that the relativist application of this strategy makes use of the following biconditional schema (where  $s_c$  stands for the value that  $c$  fixes for parameter  $s$ ): proposition  $p$  is true relative to context of assessment  $c$  iff by  $s_c$ ,  $p$  is true. Since this biconditional is read as a schema, “ $c$ ” and “ $p$ ” are not taken to respectively name a particular context of assessment and a particular proposition but are seen as schematic letters respectively ranging over different contexts and propositions. Accordingly, in order to explain how the relativist could apply the second linking strategy in accordance with our proposed metalanguage interpretation, it proves useful in what follows to use “ $c_1$ ” and “ $c_2$ ” as if they named two particular contexts that can be assigned to the schematic letter “ $c$ .”

Assuming that one occupies  $c_1$ , one could endorse the following instance of the schema: proposition  $p$  is true relative to context of assessment  $c_1$  iff by  $s_{c_1}$ ,  $p$  is true, as well as all other instances where a right context of assessment (one that coincides with  $c_1$  in fixing  $s_{c_1}$ ) is assigned to the schematic letter “ $c$ .” Since we are assuming that *truth* is equivalent to *truth at all such contexts*, we can consider the truth predicate occurring on the right hand side of such a biconditional as our ordinary assessment sensitive truth predicate. In turn, one could make sense of the assignments of *wrong* contexts of assessment (i.e. contexts fixing *wrong* values for parameter  $s$ ) to “ $c$ ” in the line suggested by our proposed metalanguage interpretation. For example, one could read the particular biconditional obtained by assigning to “ $c$ ” a context  $c_2$  that one does not occupy and that fixes a *wrong*

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we should not say that it is relative to a context of assessment whether a given proposition is true at a particular context of assessment.

parametric value as stating the following: proposition  $p$  is true relative to context of assessment  $c_2$  iff, in case  $c_2$  were a right context of assessment, by  $s_{c_2}$   $p$  would be true.

#### 4.4. An objection to our preferred linking explanation

We can pose against our last relativist linking explanation an objection similar to the first horn of Boghossian's dilemma. Accordingly, it can be argued that this proposal does not ultimately help the relativist to face this dilemma.

According to our relativist linking explanation, once one occupies a context of assessment one cannot consider that an assessment sensitive proposition is *literally* true as assessed from other contexts determining different parametric values. Then, it could be argued, it does not make sense to say that truth and accuracy are relative to contexts of assessment. At most one could say that they are relative to the right contexts of assessment, namely the context one occupies plus all others fixing the same parametric values. But this may not strike us as a truth relativist position after all, since it does not seem to accept truly non-monadic truth and accuracy notions respectively relating propositions and assertions or belief tokens to a range of contexts of assessment licensing different truth and accuracy assessments. According to this line of argument, our preferred linking explanation makes truth relativism collapse into an absolutist position that provides no inter-contextual justification for the rightness of some contexts of assessment and the wrongness of others. In other words, it makes truth relativism collapse into a sort of absolutist-chauvinist view. And this would show that truth relativism is an unstable view: either it cannot provide an illuminating link between its technical truth notion and the ordinary one or –if it does provide such a link- it collapses into a chauvinist kind of absolutism.

The relativist should, first of all, claim that the (structurally complex) monadic notion seen as equivalent to ordinary monadic truth, namely *truth at a right context of assessment*, is itself assessment sensitive (i.e. what is *right* can vary across contexts of assessment). As a result, adopting the notion of *right context of assessment* would be compatible with the avoidance of an absolute point of view regarding certain matters. But this simple answer is insufficient, since it is based on

the notion of assessment sensitivity that we are trying to illuminate. Hence, the relativist has to offer some further explanation of what the *rightness* of a parametric value and context of assessment amounts to. As we shall see in chapter 8, in the case of personal taste, aesthetic or moral predicates she could carry out this task, for instance, by appealing to evidence showing the existence of intractable disagreements (i.e. disagreements that cannot be solved *in principle* by rational means) involving truth judgments that are somehow indispensable in our lives. Smith (2010, 2012) does something along these lines. As we shall explain in the just-mentioned chapter, whether such an explanation can be given is a question that most contemporary relativists have avoided.

In the following chapters I attempt to analyze in a case-by-case basis whether the linking problem can be answered by means of providing some explanation of what the *rightness* of a context of assessment amounts to. In doing so, we shall address this question with respect to particularized notions of assessment sensitivity depending on which feature of the context of assessment we focus our attention on, e.g. set of worlds-assessment sensitivity in the case of future contingents, knowledge standard-assessment sensitivity in the case of knowledge ascriptions, information state-assessment sensitivity in the case of epistemic modals and taste standard-assessment sensitivity in the case of predicates of personal taste.

I shall argue against a relativist treatment of knowledge ascriptions and epistemic modals by appealing to specific considerations about these cases that can be made without making reference to the peculiar linking problem the relativist faces. Be that as it may, these specific objections show that we cannot make sense of the notion of *right context of assessment* and so solve this problem in these cases. In chapter 8 I consider again the objection presented at the beginning of this section in connection with –what I call– idiosyncratically evaluative predicates. In the case of these predicates, as we shall see, truth relativism does not face specific problems analogous to the ones it faces in the case of knowledge ascriptions and epistemic modals.

## Part II

### Cases Subject to a Relativist Treatment

## 5

**Future Contingents**

MacFarlane (2003, 2008, 2014, 201-237) proposes a truth relativist treatment of future contingents (i.e. sentences or propositions about contingent future events). His view addresses the following puzzle. On the one hand, our theory of natural language should contemplate the possibility of indeterminism being true, since whether the future is determined by the present state of the world is a question for physics. And if indeterminism were true, at a present context a future contingent claim (i.e. an assertion of a proposition about a contingent future event) would not be accurate (i.e. it would be inaccurate), since the asserted proposition would be neither true nor false.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, we afterwards –when the time of the predicted event has passed– often assess as true that very same proposition, and presumably as accurate the previously made assertion. But if the future were objectively open, there would be no fact about the context of utterance that determines whether the asserted proposition is true or false. Can we vindicate this seemingly inconsistent practice of assessing future contingent claims? Analogous remarks could be made concerning belief tokens.

Let us illustrate this puzzle with an example. Suppose one asserts today that tomorrow is going to be sunny. If we assume that indeterminism about the weather is true, we should assess the proposition asserted as neither true nor false and so the assertion as inaccurate. Suppose now that one day has passed and that the current day is a sunny day. We seem now entitled to judge that the proposition asserted was true and that, presumably, the assertion was accurate. It seems that we are committing a contradiction and consequently that at least one of the two judgments is mistaken. How, then, could we make sense of our practice of assessing future contingent propositions and their assertions?

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<sup>1</sup> For MacFarlane, an assertion is accurate iff the asserted proposition is true at the contextually relevant circumstance(s) of evaluation. Notice that, since “inaccurate” just means not accurate, an assertion of a proposition that is neither true nor false at such circumstance(s) should be classed as inaccurate. In MacFarlane (2014, 226) words: “present assertions concerning the future can be shown to be inaccurate by a proof of present unsettledness.”

David Lewis (1986, 199-209) thought that it was necessary to either accept determinism or see our ordinary talk and attitudes about the future as deeply confused. In turn, MacFarlane (2014, 201-202) intends to offer a proposal that at the same time vindicates this talk and these attitudes and it is compatible with indeterminism. His proposal consists of (i) a recursive semantics devised to talk about a branching future and (ii) a post-semantic relativist definition of *truth at a context*.

Regarding the first point, he invites us to think about time in terms of a branching tree moving from the present towards the future instead of a line running from the past to the future. The branching picture is meant to represent the future as objectively open in a strong metaphysical sense. The different branches found at one particular time are meant to represent the different possibilities objectively open at the time immediately preceding the branching. The intended kind of possibility at stake is usually called “historical possibility” and is thought to be consistent with physical law. What is possible in this sense changes with time. Something possible at a given time may cease to be possible at a later time, and every past event is historically necessary. Finally, a particular line running from the past to the present and continuing along one particular branch of the future is identified with a possible world. Since what is historically possible is relative to the present time, possible worlds overlap at least until that time.<sup>2,3</sup> For instance, consider an assertive utterance of (1) made at  $t_0$  on Saturday:

(1) It will be sunny tomorrow (at the place where the asserter is).

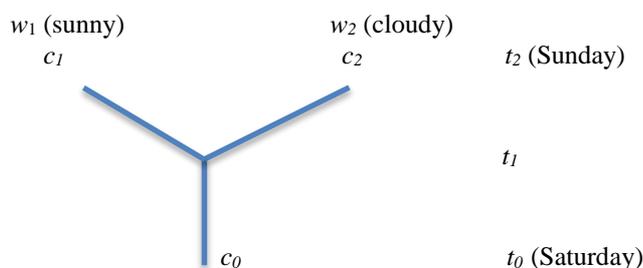
Suppose now that from a context  $c_0$  at time  $t_0$  there are two relevant possibilities open:  $w_1$  (where it is sunny on Sunday at the place where the asserter is) and  $w_2$

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth pointing out that we can see the linear picture as a limiting case of the branching picture: in case there were at present only one possible future course of events, there would be –as it were– only one possible future branch (i.e. the future would be determined by the present state of the world). Thus, although MacFarlane proposes the branching picture in order to formulate a view on future contingents compatible with indeterminism, his view is meant to be also compatible with determinism.

<sup>3</sup> Branching tree diagrams would be one way of representing MacFarlane’s view on time. Now, since MacFarlane is willing to say that we can say truly that, for instance, yesterday it was unsettled that today it was going to rain, we may want to represent in our diagram some branches that are not live possibilities at present but were open possibilities in the past. Therefore, a net having some paths open and others closed off may better represent this metaphysical picture (this metaphysical difference between the paths can be represented, for instance, by drawing them in different colours).

(where it is cloudy on Sunday at that very same place). If we wanted to draw a diagram to analyze how such a claim should be assessed at different contexts, we could use the following one, where  $c_1$  and  $c_2$  are two contexts respectively located in  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  at time  $t_2$  (on Sunday) and in the same place as  $c_0$  is located:



Based on this metaphysical picture, MacFarlane (2014, 204-207) devises a modal semantics with the resources to talk about the branching future, providing a recursive truth definition for sentences at a context and index and for propositions at a circumstance of evaluation. As he stresses, the pragmatically relevant definition (i.e. the one that is meant to link our semantic theory with our linguistic practice) is not this semantic truth definition but the notion of *truth at a context*. The context at which a sentence and proposition are used to make an assertion and –if you accept Macfarlane’s view- the one at which they are assessed, would determine the relevant indices or circumstances for assessing such a sentence or proposition for truth and, derivatively, how the assertion is to be evaluated for accuracy.

Now, truth relativism constitutes one possible way of addressing the post-semantic question of how to define truth at a context; there are other alternative views that are compatible with the semantics MacFarlane devises to talk about a branching future. One such a view is supervaluationism, which is a form of non-indexical contextualism. In this chapter I argue that MacFarlane does not provide good reasons to prefer his view to supervaluationism. The only type of evidence that could be used to support his proposal consists in the apparent existence of accurate future contingent claims made in the past, and such evidence is controversial. As a result of this, the introduction of novel post-semantic devices such as contexts of assessment turns out to be ill motivated in the present case. However, as we shall see, MacFarlane’s view on future contingents can provide an explanatory link between its

non-monadic truth notion and the ordinary monadic one, and so it can hardly be accused of making use of an unintelligible truth notion.

In the first section I introduce truth relativism and supervaluationism as well as the alleged advantage of the former over the latter. In the second one I briefly show that relativism about future contingents can straightforwardly explain its non-monadic truth notion in terms of our ordinary monadic one. In the third section I argue that there is no sufficient evidence for the existence of retrospective accuracy assessments supporting relativism about future contingents, and no possible disagreements and retractions lending support to this proposal. This scenario casts doubt on the alleged advantages of truth relativism presented in the first section and makes MacFarlane's (2008, 98-101) "actually" operator argument crucial to support truth relativism over supervaluationism. In the fourth and last section I present the just-mentioned argument and show that Roberto Loss (2012, 19-22) has successfully rebutted it. From the weakness of the data supporting relativism about future contingents we finally conclude that the question of whether we should consider this view as true is partially dependent on whether there are other cases deserving a relativist treatment that make this particular proposal non-*ad hoc*.

### 5.1. Truth relativism and supervaluationism

According to the semantics and underlying metaphysics shared by supervaluationism and truth relativism, a context singles out a unique time (i.e. the time of the context) but not necessarily a unique world. Since at the time of a context several future possible courses of events may be open, a context does not in general single out a unique world but a class of worlds, namely the worlds overlapping at the context.<sup>4</sup> We use –following MacFarlane (2014, 204-207)– the following notation to spell out the different proposals and ignore, for simplicity's sake, the assignment to the variables in our indices. Let  $W(c)$  be the class of worlds that overlap at context  $c$ ,  $[[S]]^c_w$  the extension of a sentence  $S$  relative to a context  $c$  and an index  $w$  (i.e. the

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth pointing out that according to the thin red line view a context determines one single world in a way that is compatible with indeterminism. For a presentation of this view see Belnap and Green (1994) and MacFarlane (2014, 209-213).

world  $w$ )<sup>5</sup>, and  $|S|^c$  the (classical world-neutral) proposition  $S$  expresses at context  $c$ .<sup>6</sup> We can get a relativist post-semantics by introducing a certain modification into a supervaluationist post-semantics. The supervaluationist definitions of truth at a context for sentences and classical propositions are as follows:

(S1) A sentence  $S$  is true/false at  $c$  iff for every  $w \in W(c)$ ,  $[[S]]^c_w = \text{True/False}$ .

(S2) A proposition  $|S|^c$  is true/false at  $c$  iff for every  $w \in W(c)$ ,  $|S|^c$  is true/false at  $w$ .

(S1) and (S2) give rise to truth-value gaps: those propositions that turn out to have different truth-values at the worlds overlapping at the context of use are neither true nor false.

According to supervaluationism, despite a classical proposition having a truth-value only relative to a possible world, which possible worlds are relevant for assessing a proposition depends on the time at which the proposition is used (i.e. the time of the context of use). Hence, supervaluationism is able to do justice to the way we assess for truth what is said at a given time. Suppose that indeterminism about the weather is true and that Ann said yesterday that it was going to be sunny today. Since at the context where Ann made her assertion it was unsettled whether it was going to be sunny today, at that context one can say truly about the proposition Ann asserted that it is neither true nor false. Suppose now that it is sunny today. Supervaluationism correctly predicts that one can say truly today about the very same proposition Ann asserted yesterday that it is true. The context at which we are asserting or simply entertaining this proposition when predicating a truth-value or truth-value gap of it has changed from one day to the next, and consequently the worlds overlapping at each context –i.e. the ones one should take as relevant for assessing the proposition for truth- are different.

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<sup>5</sup> MacFarlane's (2014, 204-207, 226) indices include an assignment to the variables. Since for our present purposes the precise details of MacFarlane's sentential truth definitions are not relevant, I here take indices as being just possible worlds.

<sup>6</sup> At the propositional level, MacFarlane (2014, 207, 227) chooses to formulate his position talking mainly about classical propositions (i.e. propositions that have a truth-value only relative to a possible world). Be that as it may, he (2014, 227) also provides a propositional truth at a context definition for propositions that can also be time-neutral. As he (2014, 207) points out, the positions here considered could be formulated in terms of time-neutral propositions as well as in terms of other kinds of non-classical propositions. For simplicity's sake, I just consider the case of classical propositions.

We can see the point more clearly if we notice that, according to the semantics shared by supervenience and truth relativism, the object language truth predicate is a monadic predicate that satisfies the *Equivalence Schema*.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, “true” can be predicated of a proposition  $p$  at  $\langle c, w \rangle$  iff  $p$  is true at  $w$ . Given this semantics for “true,” a simple argument shows that Ann said something true yesterday:

1. Yesterday Ann uttered the sentence “It will be sunny tomorrow” (premise)
2. Yesterday Ann said that it would be sunny today (from 1 by the semantics for “tomorrow”)
3. It is sunny today (premise)
4. What Ann said yesterday is true (from 2, 3 by the *Equivalence Schema*)

Be that as it may, supervenience takes accuracy to be absolute and so it would not solve MacFarlane’s puzzle. An assertion or belief token would be a way of using a proposition at a given context, and supervenience takes the context of use as fixing all the worlds relevant for truth assessments. Accordingly, on this view an assertion (belief token) is accurate iff the asserted (believed) proposition is true at all the worlds overlapping at the context where the assertion (belief token) is made (held). In other words, supervenience is a form of non-indexical contextualism: it takes the truth of certain world-neutral propositions to vary across contexts, but conceives of the accuracy of assertions and belief tokens as fixed once and for all. Thus, MacFarlane (2008, 89-90; 2014, 224-226) claims that supervenience does not do justice to the way we retrospectively assess assertions for accuracy: future contingent claims are absolutely assessed as inaccurate because of the proposition asserted not being true at all the worlds overlapping at the context where the claim is made, and so cannot be assessed as accurate at later times. That is, supervenience would not offer an answer to the puzzle that allows us to vindicate indeterminism and –what MacFarlane takes to be– our retrospective accuracy assessments.

There is an answer to this critical observation that makes the “actually” operator argument particularly relevant in arguing for the superiority of relativism over supervenience. We shall consider this answer and the just-mentioned argument in the third and fourth sections respectively. For now, let us see how truth relativism

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<sup>7</sup> Recall that this schema states the following: the proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ . Or, in formal vocabulary:  $\forall x ((x = \text{the proposition that } p) \supset (\text{true}(x) \equiv p))$ .

is designed to fix the alleged drawback had by supervaluationism. As we said, we can get a truth relativist post-semantics by introducing a change into the supervaluationist post-semantics. Instead of quantifying over all the worlds that overlap at the context of use when defining truth at a context, truth relativism quantifies over all the worlds overlapping at the context of use  $c_0$  and the context of assessment  $c_1$ . The set of worlds overlapping at both contexts is defined in the following way:

$$W(c_0, c_1) = W(c_1) \text{ if } W(c_1) \subset W(c_0) \\ W(c_0) \text{ otherwise}^8$$

The truth relativist definitions run then as follows:

(R1) A sentence  $S$  is true/false as used at  $c_0$  and assessed from context  $c_1$  iff for every  $w \in W(c_0, c_1)$ ,  $[[S]]^{c_0}_w = \text{True/False}$ .

(R2) A proposition  $|S|^{c_0}$  is true/false as used at context  $c_0$  and assessed from context  $c_1$  iff for every  $w \in W(c_0, c_1)$ ,  $|S|^{c_0}$  is true/false at  $w$ .

(R1) and (R2), like (S1) and (S2), give rise to truth-value gaps: those propositions that do not have the same truth-value at all worlds overlapping at the context of use and the context of assessment are neither true nor false. This would typically happen when both context coincide, that is when one assesses a proposition at the context at which it is used.

Truth relativism yields the same results as supervaluationism does concerning retrospective truth-value assessments of what was said but different results concerning retrospective accuracy assessments.<sup>9</sup> In deriving the accuracy or

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<sup>8</sup> One could think that the context of assessment is the only context needed to determine the relevant class of worlds for assessing propositions. This would be so if the context of utterance were always in the past of the context of assessment, but MacFarlane wants to take into account the possibility of assessing hypothetical future contingent claims made in counterfactual situations. For such assessments, the worlds overlapping at the context of utterance would be the ones that matter. Therefore, in order to have a general definition, MacFarlane talks about the class of worlds overlapping at both contexts and defines such a class in the just stated way.

<sup>9</sup> Notice that when we assess what was said (i.e. a proposition) at a given time from a later time, we also use (accept or reject) this proposition at this later time. Consequently, the context of use coincides with the context of assessment. As a matter of fact, both contexts always coincide when it comes to propositional truth-value assessments. The practical difference between supervaluationism and truth relativism is found in the results they yield concerning accuracy assessments.

inaccuracy of an assertion from the truth-value or truth-value gap of the asserted proposition as used at the context of the assertion and assessed from our current context, we would obtain results that are in line with our linguistic practice. In case  $c_0$  is in the past of  $c_1$  (i.e. if both contexts are in one single world),  $W(c_0, c_1) = W(c_1)$ . Hence, an assessor at  $c_1$  must judge an assertion made at  $c_0$  as accurate just in case the proposition asserted is true at all the worlds that overlap at  $c_1$ . In this way truth relativism would explain why a future contingent claim that –due to indeterminism– is inaccurate as assessed from the context where it is made because of the asserted proposition being neither true nor false, could be at a later context correctly judged as accurate. On the other hand, when  $c_0 = c_1$  the assessor must judge the assertion as accurate just in case the proposition asserted is true at all the worlds overlapping at  $c_0$ , or for that matter  $c_1$ .

According to what we said, in case indeterminism were true, an assessor at  $c_0$  should not judge a future contingent claim made at the time of that context as accurate but as inaccurate (because of the proposition asserted not being true). This is the reason why MacFarlane (2008, 90; 2014, 226) holds that whereas a proof of present unsettledness (i.e. a proof that it is not settled whether a future contingent proposition is true or false) can be sufficient to compel retraction, a proof of past unsettledness is not sufficient for this: an assertion that is inaccurate as assessed from context  $c$  because of the proposition asserted being neither true nor false, can be accurate as assessed from a later context  $c'$  because of that very same proposition being true.

## 5.2. An answer to the linking question

In addition to the just presented advantage that truth relativism would have over supervaluationism, the view can certainly provide a straightforward explanatory link between its non-monadic truth notion and the ordinary monadic one. As we argued in chapter 4, the challenge faced by the linking explanation that the relativist should endorse was to give an explanation of what the *rightness* of a *right* context of

assessment amounts to.<sup>10</sup> Truth relativism about future contingents can say in this regard that a right context of assessment is a context that is located at the present time and is actual as opposed to merely possible. In other words, a right context of assessment would be a context *only* belonging to all candidates for the actual world or, equivalently, a context all these worlds overlap at.

Given that *truth* is naturally seen as equivalent to *truth in the actual world*, the above stated explanation of what the rightness of a context of assessment amounts to seems unproblematic. There may be room for debate concerning how to exactly account for the metaphysical notion of *actuality*, but most contemporary philosophers are not willing to reject this notion and its natural connection to simple monadic truth.

Be that as it may, as we shall see, the evidence adduced in support of truth relativism and against supervaluationism is unconvincing.

### 5.3. The evidence for truth relativism

As MacFarlane (2008, 94-98) acknowledges, there is no robust evidence for the existence of retrospective accuracy assessments supporting truth relativism about future contingents. The reason why this is so is that “accuracy” is a technical term devised to talk about the correctness of assertions and belief tokens derived from the truth of their contents. Truth, in turn, would be pre-theoretically predicated only of propositions and so, insofar as the alleged data on assessments of future contingent claims involve the ordinary truth predicate, they would have to do with the contents of the claims not with the claims themselves. According to this, speakers do not have an everyday term to assess the accuracy of assertions and belief tokens. This does not mean that we do not have and cannot elicit intuitions about accuracy,<sup>11</sup> but it puts into question part of the adduced retrospective assessment data based on everyday dialogues, since when speakers judge a past future contingent claim as true or false they would be just assessing at their context the asserted proposition, which at the

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<sup>10</sup> Recall that according to this linking explanation, *truth* is equivalent to *truth at a right context of assessment*.

<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, as we explained in the introduction, in appealing to the notion of assessment sensitive accuracy to account for a range of alleged retractions and disagreements the relativist assumes that the notion of accuracy is intuitively significant.

context of utterance was neither true nor false. In the end, all the evidential weight based on dialogues is laid on our use of sentences like “I was right,” “She was right” or “You were right,” which do seem to imply that we are now assessing a previous assertion or belief token as accurate. But we could cast doubt on the legitimacy of such data and motivate opposite intuitions by stressing the fact that from the context where it was made a future contingent claim was inaccurate because of the future being unsettled, and so the speaker was not entitled to make this claim.

On the other hand, one cannot elicit intuitions of disagreement or retraction to support relativism about future contingents. There are two types of purported disagreements that one might think could lend support to this view. Firstly, we could appeal to cases where two parties occupying contexts that are located at different branches disagree over the accuracy of a future contingent claim made in the past of these two contexts (i.e. a claim made before these two contexts branched). But notice that these alleged disagreeing parties occupy different (sets of) worlds. Are we entitled to say that someone in a counterfactual situation would be wrong in judging that a past future contingent claim, which we assess as accurate given how the world *actually* turned out to be, was inaccurate? The answer seems to be negative, since when we think about a hypothetical assessor in a counterfactual situation we arguably shift the world(s) of evaluation and must consider whether she would be right or wrong if the world were such and such. We should thus determine whether she would be right or wrong taking into account the counterfactual situation she is in. Accordingly, we should take the allegedly disagreeing parties’ judgments about a past claim as being about the same claim but concerning different (sets of) worlds. As a result, their disagreement should be classed as a mere case of *doxastic non-cotenability*.<sup>12</sup>

The second kind of purported disagreements about a future contingent claim the relativist could appeal to, are ones where the parties occupy contexts located at different times of a single line of the tree, and the asserted future contingent proposition is neither true nor false as assessed from the earlier context while it is true as assessed from the later one. Can we say that the assessor at the earlier context

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<sup>12</sup> As we explained in the introduction, this is a weak form of disagreement not involving *preclusion of joint accuracy* but just the impossibility of adopting one’s disagreeing party’s attitude without changing one’s mind. As we saw, non-indexical contextualism can see the apparent disagreements adduced in support of truth relativism as cases of doxastic non-cotenability but not as cases of preclusion of joint accuracy.

can correctly (from her context) assess as inaccurate a judgment that the assessor at the later context makes and it is accurate as assessed from her context? It does not seem so. For the earlier assessor, the biggest set of worlds the later assessor occupies is different (for the moment, at least) from the one she occupies, and so the considerations from the last paragraph can be applied to this case. The opposite case, i.e. the one where the assessor at the later context correctly assesses as inaccurate the judgment made by the assessor at the earlier context, is much more plausible. After all, she is assessing a claim made by someone in the same world as she is. Be that as it may, cases where an assessor correctly rejects as inaccurate a future contingent claim made in the past do not support relativism as opposed to supervaluationism, since for the latter view all future contingent claims are inaccurate because of the asserted proposition being neither true nor false at the context of use.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, relativists about future contingents cannot appeal to retractions to support their view either. A retraction supports truth relativism insofar as this view vindicates the impression that the retracted claim is inaccurate as assessed from the context at which the retraction takes place but it is accurate as assessed from the context at which the claim was made. But, as we have seen, according to both relativism and supervaluationism, a future contingent claim is inaccurate as assessed from the context at which it is made. Thus, uses of sentences like “I was wrong/mistaken,” just as uses of sentences like “You were wrong/mistaken,” cannot support truth relativism over supervaluationism. To be sure, the relativist could claim that there are retractions (or rejections of others’ past future contingent claims) made by means of assertively uttering a sentence like “That was false,” and that only her view could vindicate them. However, as we suggested, uses of such sentences do not constitute evidence for retraction (or rejection of someone else’s claim), since the speaker can just be, from her current context, assessing for truth a previously asserted proposition without retracting (or rejecting) the assertion itself.

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<sup>13</sup> According to what we said, relativism about future contingents, unlike relativism about other cases, does not allow for the possibility of two disagreeing parties being both accurate (in a single world) relative to their different contexts of assessment. But allowing for such a possibility, I submit, makes these other relativist proposals bear a clear connection to what is pre-theoretically conceived of as a truth relativist view. Truth relativism about future contingents does not have this feature because it does not introduce in the circumstances of evaluation a non-world parameter whose value would be determined by the context of assessment. Thus, if we want our characterization of truth relativism to track what is pre-theoretically understood as a truth relativist view, we may need to characterize the approach in terms of specific kinds of assessment sensitivity involving non-world parameters in the indices and circumstances of evaluation.

To conclude, relativists about future contingents can only appeal to retrospective assessments of a future contingent claim as accurate in order to support their view, and the evidence for the existence and legitimacy of such assessments is not robust. These considerations cast doubt not only on truth relativism but also over MacFarlane's formulation of the puzzle presented at the beginning of this chapter, that is as a puzzle about the accuracy assessments of future contingent claims and not just about the truth assessments of the asserted propositions. However, MacFarlane (2008, 98-101) has put forward one further argument in support of his view, namely the "actually" operator argument. But as we shall see in the next section, Roberto Loss (2012, 19-22) has rebutted this argument.

#### 5.4. The "actually" operator argument

MacFarlane (2008, 98-101) claims that supervaluationism yields wrong predictions concerning our use of "actually." More precisely, it would yield wrong predictions about the truth-value of the propositions asserted in the past by means of sentences like (2):

(2) It will actually be sunny tomorrow.

According to MacFarlane, "actually" is an operator whose uses are constrained by the principle of *Initial Redundancy* (I will not question this assumption):

*IR*: An operator  $*$  is *initial redundant* just in case for all sentences  $S$ , ' $* S$ ' is true at exactly the same contexts of use (and assessment) as  $S$  (equivalently: each is a logical consequence of the other).

In standard non-branching frameworks, the semantics for this operator respects *IR* and runs as follows:

(A) ‘Actually:  $S$ ’ is true at  $\langle c, w \rangle$  iff  $S$  is true at  $\langle c, w_c \rangle$ , where  $c$  is a context of use,  $w$  is a world, and  $w_c$  is the world of  $c$ .<sup>14</sup>

The above stated semantics for “actually” respects *IR*, since the operator is taken to shift the world of evaluation to the world of the context of use no matter how deeply embedded it is. But in a branching framework we arguably need a different semantics for “actually,” since there need not be a world of the context.<sup>15</sup> According to MacFarlane, whereas supervaluationism has to endorse (A<sub>1</sub>), truth relativism has to endorse (A<sub>2</sub>):

(A<sub>1</sub>) ‘Actually:  $S$ ’ is true at  $\langle c, w \rangle$  iff  $S$  is true at  $\langle c, w' \rangle$ , for all  $w' \in W(c)$ .

(A<sub>2</sub>) ‘Actually:  $S$ ’ is true at  $\langle c_u, c_a, w \rangle$  iff  $S$  is true at  $\langle c_u, c_a, w' \rangle$ , for all  $w' \in W(c_u, c_a)$ , where  $c_u$  is the context of use and  $c_a$  is the context of assessment.<sup>16</sup>

According to (A<sub>1</sub>) “actually” universally quantifies over the worlds overlapping at the context of use, whereas (A<sub>2</sub>) states that it universally quantifies over the worlds that overlap at the context of use and the context of assessment. As a result, both (A<sub>1</sub>) and (A<sub>2</sub>) satisfy *IR*.

Suppose now that yesterday at context  $c_0$  I uttered (2) and that today at context  $c_1$  it is sunny. Insofar as supervaluationism would endorse (A<sub>1</sub>), it would be committed to claim that what I said yesterday was true if and only if it is sunny today at all the worlds overlapping at  $c_0$ . Since this is not the case, supervaluationism would counter-intuitively predict that if I were to say today that what I said yesterday was true, I would say something false. Truth relativism, on the other hand, would correctly predict that I can say this truly today, since today it is sunny at all the worlds overlapping at the context of use  $c_0$  and the context of assessment  $c_1$ . This is MacFarlane’s “actually” operator argument against supervaluationism.

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<sup>14</sup> We are assuming that  $S$  is a sentence that lacks quantifiers, and so we can afford not mentioning the assignment to the variables that should be included in the indices. That is, for simplicity’s sake we are taking indices as being just possible worlds and, as a result, our sentential evaluation points as being pairs of contexts and worlds. Be that as it may, throughout this dissertation I normally take indices to include an assignment to the variables.

<sup>15</sup> This can be questioned. According to the thin red line view, we could coherently talk about the world of the context of use even if indeterminism were true. For a presentation of this view see Belnap and Green (1994) and MacFarlane (2014, 209-213).

<sup>16</sup> Note that in order to give a recursive semantics for the “actually” operator, the relativist would need to take contexts of assessment into account at the strictly semantic level.

As Loss (2012, 19-21) shows, MacFarlane's argument assumes that supervenience cannot help but consider "actually" as an indexically context-sensitive expression (i.e. an expression that makes different contributions to propositional content across contexts), but this is a false assumption because there are alternative non-indexical contextualist semantics for this expression that supervenience can endorse. Thus, Loss's reply has two parts: (a) first, he shows that MacFarlane assumes that supervenience must take "actually" as an indexically context-sensitive expression, and (b) then he argues that there is an alternative semantics for "actually" available to this view.

There is a simple argument for the first thesis. Notice that MacFarlane is committed to say that the following argument (let us call it *A*) is invalid within a supervenience framework:

1. Yesterday I uttered the sentence "It will actually be sunny tomorrow" (premise).
2. Yesterday I said that it would be actually sunny today (from 1 by the semantics for "tomorrow" and "today").
3. It is actually sunny today (premise).
4. What I said yesterday is true (from 2 and 3 by the *Equivalence Schema*<sup>17</sup>).

Assuming that 1 and 3 are true, if *A* were valid within the supervenience framework MacFarlane's objection would be mistaken, since its conclusion would be true within that framework contrary to what MacFarlane claims. In other words, if MacFarlane's criticism were right, *A* should be invalid within a supervenience framework. Now, once the *Equivalence Schema* is assumed, the only part of *A* that can be responsible for its invalidity is the transition from 1 to 2. This, in turn, implies that the proposition asserted yesterday by uttering "It will actually be sunny tomorrow" is different from the one asserted today by uttering "It is actually sunny today."<sup>18</sup> And given the semantic assumptions that, together with MacFarlane (2008,

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<sup>17</sup> Recall that this principle states the following:  $\forall x ((x = \text{the proposition that } S) \supset (\text{true}(x) \equiv S))$ .

<sup>18</sup> Loss (2012, 20) presents one further argument to show that MacFarlane assumes that supervenience takes the propositions asserted by means of these utterances to be different:

1. Yesterday (by uttering the sentence "It will actually be sunny tomorrow") I expressed the proposition  $P_1$  (premise).
2. Today (by uttering the sentence "It is actually sunny today") I have expressed the proposition  $P_2$

99-101), we are making (i.e. we are treating “today” and “tomorrow” as directly referential expressions,<sup>19</sup> and tense markers in general either as referential expressions or quantifiers), these utterances can express different propositions only if “actually” is an indexically context-sensitive expression.

But is it mandatory for supervaluationism to treat “actually” as an indexically context-sensitive expression? It is not difficult to show that the answer to this question is negative. As Loss (2012, 21-22) argues, in order to devise a non-indexical contextualist semantics for “actually” satisfying *initial redundancy (IR)* we need to do three things:

- (i) First, we have to enrich our indices and circumstances of evaluation with a *set-of-worlds* parameter  $s$  (i.e. the *actuality* parameter).<sup>20</sup>
- (ii) Second, we have to define the semantic truth conditions for “actually.” Loss proposes the following definition: ‘Actually:  $S$ ’ is true at context  $c$  and index  $\langle w, s \rangle$  (where  $w$  is a world and  $s$  is a set of worlds) iff  $S$  is true at  $c$  and every index  $\langle w', s' \rangle$ , where  $w'$  is a world belonging to  $s$ .<sup>21, 22</sup>
- (iii) Finally, we need to replace the original supervaluationist definitions of sentential and propositional truth at a context presented in the first section with the following definitions:  
 (S1') A sentence  $S$  is true/false at  $c$  iff  $S$  is true/false at  $c$  and every index  $\langle w, s_c \rangle$ , such that  $w$  is a world overlapping at  $c$  and  $s_c$  is the set of worlds overlapping at  $c$ .

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(premise)

3. It is actually sunny today (premise)

4.  $P_2$  is true (from 2 and 3 by the semantics for “true”)

5.  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are the same proposition (premise)

6. What I said yesterday is true (from 1, 4 and 5 by the *Equivalence Schema*)

This is a valid argument. In order to reject its conclusion, the only premise that makes sense to reject is 5.

<sup>19</sup> Loss (2012, 19-20) presents his argument without using these two expressions, but a name for a particular time (i.e.  $t_2$ ). This shows that MacFarlane’s “actually” operator argument would still be in trouble if these semantic assumptions were not made.

<sup>20</sup> As a result, our circumstances are order pairs consisting of a world and a set of worlds, whereas our indices are ordered triples consisting of a world, a set of worlds and an assignment to the variables. We are here ignoring this assignment.

<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, the proposition expressed at  $c$  by ‘Actually:  $S$ ’ is true at a circumstance  $\langle w, s \rangle$  iff the proposition expressed at  $c$  by  $S$  is true at every circumstance  $\langle w', s' \rangle$ , where  $w'$  is a world belonging to  $s$ .

<sup>22</sup> Loss (2012, 23) ultimately defends a different non-indexical contextualist definition in order to allow a sentence like “It will actually be sunny” to be gappy (lack a truth-value) when a sentence like “It will be sunny” is gappy.

(S2') A proposition  $|S|^c$  is true/false at  $c$  iff it is true/false at every circumstance  $\langle w, s_c \rangle$ , such that  $w$  is a world overlapping at  $c$  and  $s_c$  is the set of worlds overlapping at  $c$ .

The three points above stated show that in order to universally quantify over the set of worlds overlapping at the context of use we do not have to endorse (A<sub>1</sub>). According to (ii) and (iii), the truth-conditional contribution of “actually” involves such a universal quantification. This secures *IR*. But on this semantics, despite “actually” being sensitive to the context of use, the feature of such a context that this operator is sensitive to (i.e. the set of worlds overlapping at this context) does not affect the proposition expressed but just becomes part of the index and circumstance that are contextually relevant for respectively assessing for truth a sentence containing “actually” and the proposition it expresses. Thus, so defined “actually” is sensitive to the context of use but does not make different contributions to propositional content across contexts. As a result, argument *A* can be valid within a supervaluationist framework, which means that MacFarlane’s “actually” operator argument is mistaken.

This scenario makes the evidence for truth relativism and against supervaluationism rather weak. In the end, the evidence for the former view consists entirely in the apparent existence of accurate future contingent claims made in the past and, as we saw in section 5.3, this evidence can be put into question. Be that as it may, it can be argued that, despite not being robust, this evidence still lends some support to truth relativism. Moreover, since the proposal can explain its non-monadic truth notion in terms of the ordinary monadic one, it can hardly be accused of using an unintelligible truth notion. Hence, the question of whether we should go relativist in the present case is arguably dependent on whether there are other cases deserving a relativist treatment that make this particular proposal non-*ad hoc*. We shall consider other truth relativist proposals in the following chapters.

## 6

**Knowledge Ascriptions**

In this chapter I argue that (i) truth relativism about knowledge ascriptions (MacFarlane 2005b, 2005c, 2011, 2014; Richard 2004, 2008, 166-176) needs to impute systematic ignorance to speakers in a way that prevents it from answering the linking problem, and (ii) it is possible to explain away the data adduced in favor of a relativist treatment of knowledge ascriptions over a non-indexical contextualist one. Given these two points, I conclude that if we are moved by the bulk of the evidence adduced against the traditional approaches, there is a reasonable case for non-indexical contextualism about “know(s).” With respect to the first point, I specifically consider an objection that Martin Montminy (2009) poses to truth relativism about “know(s)” and MacFarlane (2014, 196-200) spells out and tries to respond to.

It is worth pointing out that the same argument I present here against a relativist treatment of “know(s)” can be used against a relativist treatment of a range of gradable adjectives (e.g. “rich,” “flat”), like the one Richard (2008) defends. These are expressions whose extension is supposed to be resolved in context by practical or conversational factors. As we shall see, my reason for rejecting a relativist account of knowledge ascriptions is based on the fact that the relativist takes the extension of “know(s)” to be fixed by such factors.

In the first section I present the considerations that advocates of truth relativism adduce against alternative proposals. In the second one I present what I take to be the best truth relativist proposal about knowledge ascriptions on offer and explain how it would overcome the flaws that alternative views have. In the third section I consider Montminy’s objection and criticize MacFarlane’s response to it. Finally, in the fourth and last section, I put the evidence adduced against non-indexical contextualism about knowledge ascriptions into question and argue that this proposal does better than truth relativism.

### 6.1. The case against non-relativist proposals

The variation perceived in our usage of the verb “know(s)” is not easily explainable. Commonly, if somebody asks you whether you know that your wallet is in your jacket and you remember putting it there this morning before leaving your home, you will answer that you do. On the other hand, when somebody asks you whether you know your wallet has not been unnoticeably stolen while you were on the bus, you may naturally say that you do not. Now, since it is clear that in case somebody stole your wallet it would not be in your jacket, how can you know it is there while ignoring whether it was stolen while you were on the bus? You may concede that, after all, you did not know that the wallet was in your jacket, but notice that analogous considerations can be brought up to put into question any piece of knowledge. As an example of an extremely strong demand asked for knowledge, we can mention the case of the skeptic who asks you to rule out the possibility of being a brain in a vat in order for you to know that you have hands.

We can adopt two general strategies to deal with this conundrum: either we can take our practice of attributing and denying knowledge as deeply mistaken or we can try to do justice to this practice by semantically accounting for it. The first strategy is mainly represented by two possible evaluative invariantist views: skepticism, which claims that we know very little, and dogmatism, which claims that we know a lot (e.g. in the above stated example, you would know both that your wallet is in your jacket and that it has not been stolen). Most philosophers do not adopt this first strategy. Not only does taking our common practice as deeply mistaken seem a wrong methodological approach, but also there are –as MacFarlane (2014, 179) points out- specific problems exhibited by skepticism and dogmatism. Skepticism can try to explain our willingness to falsely attribute knowledge by claiming that it is reasonable to do it for practical purposes. But this is not a good explanation because typically when we say something literally false to convey something true we are, unlike when we make knowledge claims, aware of this. In the same vein, a dogmatist can claim that, even though many of the knowledge reports we refrain from making are true, we do not make them in order to avoid creating misleading expectations (e.g. despite not needing to rule out the possibility of having been robbed in order to know that my wallet is in my jacket, saying that I know this may suggest that I can rule it out). This explanation is not plausible, since it does not explain why we do not

just refrain from asserting that we know something but also assert that we do not know it.

The second strategy, in turn, is mainly represented by contextualism and truth relativism.<sup>1</sup> Both approaches agree on taking contexts as fixing a standard for knowing something, the difference between them being that contextualism takes the context of use and truth relativism the context of assessment as doing this. Before presenting the evidence relativists adduce against contextualism, some clarifications concerning how a context is supposed to have an impact on whether someone knows something are in order. First of all, a common way of spelling out the contextual influence on whether a subject knows that  $p$  is to consider that the relevant context imposes a set of alternatives for the subject to be able to rule out in order to know that  $p$ .<sup>2</sup> For instance, in most ordinary contexts it would not be necessary to be able to rule out the possibility of having been robbed to know that one's wallet is in one's jacket; being able to rule out the possibility of having forgotten to put it in one's jacket before leaving home would be enough. However, in contexts where the possibility of having been robbed is relevant, you would need to be able to rule it out in order to know that your wallet is in your jacket. Secondly, as Keith DeRose (1992, 914-915) points out, there are several non-mutually exclusive ways in which the contextual relevance of ruling out a possibility could be accounted for. For instance, we could say that what makes a standard of knowledge (understood as a set of alternatives to be ruled out) contextually relevant is the practical matters at stake,

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth pointing out that there is one further view that intends to semantically account for our practice of ascribing and denying knowledge. This proposal is –using Keith DeRose (2005) terminology– *subject-sensitive invariantism* (Hawthorne 2004, Stanley 2005). According to it, although “know(s)” is not context-sensitive, knowledge ascribing sentences may vary in truth-value across contexts due to the fact that knowing amounts to *being in an epistemic position that is good enough for the knower's situation*, and the situation the knower is in changes over time. As DeRose (2005, 183-190) and MacFarlane (2005b; 2005c, 213-214; 2014, 184-185) show, this proposal cannot account for many of our attributions of knowledge to people in situations different from the one we are in, including to ourselves in the past or in counterfactual situations. In making those attributions we use the knowledge standard in play in our context. For example, we do not reason as follows:

- (i) I do not know (at my high stakes context) whether my wallet is in my jacket, but all those people (in low stakes contexts) do.
- (ii) I know that my wallet is in my jacket, but I did not know this half an hour ago, when the possibility of having been robbed on the bus was relevant.
- (iii) I know that my wallet is in my jacket, but if the possibility of having been robbed on the bus were relevant, I would not know this.

<sup>2</sup> This way of spelling out truth relativism and contextualism needs to be supplemented with an explanation of what it is to rule out an alternative. Several more or less externalist or internalist answers could be given to this question.

having recently mentioned or considered some possibilities, or the conversational purposes and presuppositions. Finally, it is worth pointing out that although we shall talk about high and low standards of knowledge depending on which set of alternatives must be ruled out, we need not assume that all these sets of alternatives can be ordered in a linear scale from the lowest stakes demanded for knowledge to the highest ones.

Like in other cases, the main adduced evidence supporting truth relativism as opposed to contextualism is based on purported cases of disagreement and retraction. If John assertively utters (1) and Ann assertively utters (2) at the same time and referring to the same person, it seems that there is a disagreement between them, that Ann asserts a proposition inconsistent with the one John asserted and accordingly is disposed to reject John's claim, and that John should retract his assertion if he comes to the conclusion that Ann is right.

(1) Peter knows that his wallet is in his jacket.

(2) Peter does not know that his wallet is in his jacket.

Truth relativists argue that contextualism has trouble to do justice to the appearance of disagreement in many cases where two sentences that –like (1) and (2)– respectively attribute and deny knowledge to an individual are assertively uttered.

Indexical and non-indexical contextualism can vindicate our disagreement intuitions about a pair of speakers making knowledge claims (i.e. assertions of propositions ascribing or denying knowledge) when debating with each other. As DeRose (2005, 2006) shows, contextualists can say that when a debate takes place a conversational process (e.g. accommodation<sup>3</sup>) fixes the knowledge standard relevant to all the parties to the debate.<sup>4</sup> For an indexical contextualist the parties are asserting knowledge standard-specific contradictory propositions (i.e. each party would respectively attribute and deny knowledge according to the same standard built into

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<sup>3</sup> David Lewis (1979) introduced the notion of accommodation with respect to gradable adjectives like “flat” and “tall.” The basic idea is that members of a conversation can accept or refuse to put a certain object or individual in the extension of such a predicate and this contributes to specify a standard as conversationally relevant to apply the predicate.

<sup>4</sup> In particular, De Rose (2005, 2006) –following Robert Stalnaker (1978) and David Lewis (1979)– adopts the notion of *conversational context*. Roughly put, a conversational context is a set of presuppositions that the members of a conversation share for the purpose of having the conversation. This set would change as a result of conversational moves (e.g. assertions) these members make.

the asserted content),<sup>5</sup> whereas for a non-indexical contextualist they are asserting knowledge standard-neutral contradictory propositions that the parties must assess relative to the same knowledge standard. As a result, such a case is seen as involving *preclusion of joint accuracy*. Be that as it may, contextualists could not account for our disagreement intuitions when sentences like (1) and (2) are assertively uttered in different contexts where different standards (sets of alternatives to be ruled out) are in play, e.g. inter-conversational cases where the apparently disagreeing parties occupy temporally or locationally distant contexts and so cannot be seen as members of a single conversation. In such cases, indexical contextualists consider that compatible knowledge standard-specific propositions are asserted (i.e. each allegedly disagreeing party would respectively attribute and deny knowledge relative to different knowledge standards built into the asserted content), whereas non-indexical contextualists hold that the parties assert contradictory knowledge standard-neutral propositions but their assertions must be absolutely assessed relative to different knowledge standards. As a result, contextualists see these cases as not involving preclusion of joint accuracy, even though for the non-indexical contextualist they involve the weaker form of disagreement classed as *doxastic non-cotenability*. The relativist argues that in these last cases we have, like in the cases where the disagreeing parties are involved in a dispute, the impression that there is a disagreement involving preclusion of joint accuracy. For instance, suppose that Ann assertively utters (2) in a situation where John is not present. We are supposed to still have the impression that there is a strong disagreement between Ann and John.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, contextualists are committed to say that once you come to occupy a context where a given knowledge standard is in play, you should not retract a knowledge claim that was accurate according to the standard in play at the context where it was made, no matter whether the sentence used expresses a false proposition at the present context. On an indexical contextualist view, the content of this past assertion is a proposition that is still true at one's present context, since it is about a different knowledge standard from the one in play in one's context. On the other

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<sup>5</sup> In turn, if the relevant pragmatic process fails to fix a knowledge standard, the indexical contextualist holds that the debating parties fail to assert a proposition in the first place.

<sup>6</sup> Relatedly, we can think of eavesdropper cases involving knowledge ascriptions, i.e. cases where somebody rejects a knowledge claim and so disagrees with the person who made it without being a member of the conversation the speaker is taking part of and even ignoring all conversational presuppositions. As we shall see in the next chapter, MacFarlane (2011d, 2014) and Egan (2007, 2011) have appealed to such cases to support a truth relativist view on epistemic modals.

hand, for a non-indexical contextualist, this assertion may well have as its content a proposition that is false at one's present context, but the assertion is still accurate insofar as this proposition is true according to the standard in play at the context where the assertion was made. Relativists claim that this result does not accord with our everyday linguistic practice. For instance, once one comes to occupy a high-standard context where the possibility of one's wallet having been stolen on the bus is relevant, one would judge as inaccurate and so be prepared to retract an assertive utterance of "I know that my wallet is in my jacket" made in a low standard context from which it is to be assessed as accurate.

In addition, indexical contextualism would face some additional problems. First of all, it would fail to accommodate speakers' judgments about the truth-value of what is said in other contexts by means of ascribing or denying knowledge. This objection follows from the fact that relativists take our disagreement and retraction intuitions to reveal that sentences like (1) or (2) do not express different propositions in two contexts where different knowledge standards are in play. When one is in a high stakes context, one would be prepared to say that, for instance, what somebody says by uttering (1) is false, despite the context of this utterance being one in which prevails a low knowledge standard relative to which what is said is true (and the same goes when one is in a low stakes context and assesses what is said in a high stakes context). Relativists argue that, as a consequence of contravening these truth judgments, indexical contextualism has to impute error to speakers. Advocates of this view have to say that while speakers are in a high (low) standard context they misjudge the truth-value of what is said in low (high) standard contexts by means of ascribing or denying knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, it has been argued (Cappelen and Lepore 2005; Kölbel 2009; Richard 2004, 2008) that indexical contextualism contravenes our practice of reporting knowledge ascriptions. Even in cases where the knowledge standard in play in the knowledge ascriber's context is different from the one in play in the reporter's context, we report others' ascriptions of knowledge by using "know(s)" without any explicit relativization to the knowledge ascriber's standard. For instance, one takes

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<sup>7</sup> Analogously, the relativist argues, I use the standard in play in my context to determine the truth-value that a proposition ascribing or denying knowledge has in a counterfactual or past situation. For instance, if I am in a low standard context, I do not reason that I would not know that my wallet has not been stolen if a high standard were in play, or that I did not know that my wallet had not been stolen yesterday night, when such a standard was in play.

oneself to be entitled to assertively utter (3) in one's high standard context in order to report John's assertive utterance of (1) (i.e. "Peter knows that his wallet is in his jacket") made in a low standard context:

(3) John said that Peter knows that his wallet was in his jacket.

However, for the indexical contextualist "know(s)" is being used in a reporting context where a different knowledge standard from the one in play in the knowledge ascriber's context is in play, and so the embedded sentence would express a different proposition from the one John expressed. Therefore, indexical contextualism would render (3) false in one's reporting context, contrary to our intuitions.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, it has been argued (Schiffer 1996, 326-327) that a certain disanalogy between knowledge claims and other claims made using widely acknowledged context sensitive expressions speaks against contextualism, especially against indexical contextualism. For instance, whereas somebody using "ready" in a sentence like "John is ready" is able to explicitly provide the completion that is tacitly conveyed in context (e.g. *ready to take the exam*), people making knowledge claims are arguably unable to provide an analogous completion (e.g. *knows relative to such and such standard of knowledge or relative to such and such set of alternatives to be ruled out*).

Based on these considerations, relativists conclude that contextualists need to attribute semantic ignorance and error to speakers. They would not be aware of the truth conditions of the propositions they assert by means of using "know(s)" and, as a result, speakers would misjudge whether they disagree or agree with each other when making knowledge claims. But, the relativist argues, this is a problematic answer for the contextualist to give. For one thing, a satisfactory explanation of why speakers are semantically blind in this case but not in other similar cases (e.g. in the case of claims made by using "ready" or "local") should be given. And secondly and more importantly, attributing semantic ignorance and error to speakers tends to

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<sup>8</sup> To be sure, it can be argued that once the ascriber is mentioned, her knowledge standard becomes relevant at the reporter's context. A use of "knows" in (3) would be similar to a use of "local" in an utterance of "John went to a local bar," meaning that John went to a bar close to where he is (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009, 40-42). Be that as it may, there are some important disanalogies between "know(s)" and "local." For instance, as Stanley (2004, 138) argues, we do not seem to be able to interpret different occurrences of "know(s)" in different ways in one single sentence or discourse, as we can with "local."

undermine the positive case for contextualism. This case mainly rests on alleged evidence concerning how speakers ordinarily ascribe and deny knowledge and how they ordinarily assess propositions ascribing or denying knowledge. But once we accept that speakers' linguistic usage reflects significant semantic errors, the above-mentioned evidence for contextualism weakens significantly.

## 6.2. Truth relativism

Truth relativism is said to overcome the problems faced by contextualism and to have the same positive features as this latter approach has. Truth relativism gives the same predictions as contextualism does concerning when speakers take themselves as entitled to make a knowledge claim, since for truth relativism, at the time of making such a claim, the speaker assesses it from her context of use (i.e. for her, the context of use and the context of assessment coincide). These predictions would be in accordance with the linguistic data. In order to do justice to all the linguistic data, the relativist argues, we need to correct the results contextualism yields concerning how knowledge claims made in other contexts (including our own claims made in the past) are to be assessed. Once we posit alternatives-neutral propositions as the contents of sentences ascribing or denying knowledge and include a set of alternatives parameter in the indices and circumstances whose value is determined by the context of assessment, we could account for the problematic cases of disagreement and retraction: a person (even oneself in the past) who assertively utters a sentence ascribing or denying knowledge asserts an alternatives-neutral proposition, and if this proposition is untrue as used at the context of the asserter and assessed from one's context, the assertion is inaccurate. On the other hand, insofar as truth relativism assigns a contextually invariant (though alternatives-neutral) content to "know(s)," it vindicates, unlike indexical contextualism, speakers' knowledge reporting practices as well as speakers' inter-contextual truth assessments.

We shall focus on MacFarlane proposal, since it makes use, unlike Richard's (2004, 2008, 166-176), of contexts of assessment. MacFarlane's (2005c, 217-224; 2011a, 536-539; 2014, 187-190) proposal consists of a semantics and a post-semantics: the first one offers a definition of sentential truth at a context and index and a definition of propositional truth relative to a circumstance of evaluation,

whereas the second one appeals to these semantic definitions to define sentential and propositional truth at a context. As I have pointed out, the post-semantic definitions are the ones that are meant to have practical significance, since they are supposed to have direct implications regarding how assertions and belief tokens are to be assessed for accuracy.

At the semantic level, the proposal adds to the indices and circumstances of evaluation a parameter  $s$  that takes sets of alternatives as values. Alternatives are maximally specific possibilities understood as world/time pairs;<sup>9</sup> those alternatives not included in  $s$  are assumed to be non-actual. To know that  $p$  relative to  $s$ , a subject must rule out all alternatives included in  $s$  in which proposition  $p$  is false. Using the same nomenclature as we used in the previous chapter and taking  $x$  to be an individual and  $p$  an alternatives-neutral proposition, the extension of “know(s)” relative to a context  $c$  and index  $\langle w, t, s, a \rangle$  (where  $w$  is a world,  $t$  a time,  $s$  a set of alternatives and  $a$  an assignment to the variables) is defined as follows:  $[[\text{“Knows”}]]^c_{\langle w, t, s, a \rangle} = \langle x, p \rangle$ , such that  $p$  is true at circumstance of evaluation  $\langle w, t, s \rangle$ <sup>10</sup>,  $x$  believes  $p$  at  $\langle w, t, s \rangle$  and  $x$  can rule out every alternative in  $s$  in which  $p$  is false. The contextually invariant content of “know(s),” in turn, is a function from circumstances (world/time/set of alternatives triples) to extensions.

This semantics for “know(s)” is consistent with a non-indexical contextualist proposal about this expression. The difference between this view and truth relativism lies at the post-semantic level. The non-indexical and relativist post-semantic truth definitions run as follows:

*Non-indexical contextualist sentential truth:* a sentence  $S$  is true as used at context  $c$  iff for all assignments  $a$ ,  $[[S]]^c_{\langle w_c, t_c, s_c, a \rangle} = \text{True}$ , where  $w_c$  is the world of  $c$ ,  $t_c$  is the time of  $c$ , and  $s_c$  is the set of alternatives relevant at  $c$ .

*Non-indexical contextualist propositional truth:* a proposition  $|S|^c$  is true as used at context  $c$  iff it is true at circumstance of evaluation  $\langle w_c, t_c, s_c \rangle$ .

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<sup>9</sup> As MacFarlane (2014, 188) points out, understanding alternatives as world/time pairs instead of just as worlds allows us to easily represent someone’s knowledge or ignorance about her location in time.

<sup>10</sup> Following MacFarlane (2014, 187-190), we contemplate the existence of time-neutral propositions and so include a time in the circumstances of evaluation. Nothing specifically relevant to the topic of knowledge ascriptions hinges on this decision.

*Truth relativist sentential truth:* a sentence  $S$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from context  $c_2$  iff for all assignments  $a$ ,  $[[S]]^{c_1} \langle w_{c_1}, t_{c_1}, s_{c_2}, a \rangle = \text{True}$ , where  $w_{c_1}$  is the world of  $c_1$ ,  $t_{c_1}$  is the time of  $c_1$ , and  $s_{c_2}$  is the set of alternatives relevant at  $c_2$ .

*Truth relativist propositional truth:* a proposition  $|S|^{c_1}$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from context  $c_2$  iff it is true at circumstance of evaluation  $\langle w_{c_1}, t_{c_1}, s_{c_2} \rangle$ .

As we shall see in the fourth section, there is reason to be suspicious about the evidence (i.e. a range of disagreements and retractions) adduced against non-indexical contextualism. This circumstance together with the problem we pose to truth relativism in the next section will make a non-indexical treatment of knowledge ascriptions preferable to a relativist one.

### 6.3. A problem for truth relativism

Montminy (2009) contends that truth relativism about knowledge ascriptions needs to attribute systematic ignorance and error to speakers just as contextualism does, granting for the sake of argument the just presented objections to this latter approach. I will argue that Montminy's objection does not simply show that truth relativism about knowledge ascriptions has to make such attributions but uncovers a problem the proposal has to make sense of knowledge standard-assessment sensitive truth.<sup>11</sup> More precisely, it uncovers a problem to make sense of the notion of *right context of assessment* as applied to a relativist treatment of knowledge ascriptions, and so a problem to give an answer to the linking problem in connection with this case.

Montminy (2009, 354) asks us to consider the following case. Suppose that a speaker is in a context *High*, where the set of alternatives is such that it imposes a high standard for knowledge. While in *High*, such a speaker asserts the proposition that  $S$  does not know that  $p$ . Relative to *High* this proposition is true and the assertion made by the speaker is accurate. Later, she finds herself in another context *Low*

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<sup>11</sup> That is, a notion of truth whose extension depends on the knowledge standard relevant at the context of assessment.

where the set of alternatives is such that it imposes a low standard for knowledge. Relative to *Low* the previous proposition turns out to be false and the previous assertion inaccurate (assuming that the values for all parameters different from the knowledge standard parameter have not changed). Truth relativism predicts that when the speaker finds herself in *Low* she will be prepared to retract her earlier assertion. What Montminy observes is that, while being in *High*, the speaker will not (from that context) accept that when later she finds herself in *Low*, she will be obliged to retract the assertion she made in *High* because of its being inaccurate. As a matter of fact, Montminy claims, a speaker in *High* will judge as incorrect to withdraw in a future context *Low* her knowledge-denying claim made in *High*. And, of course, analogous observations could be made on how a speaker in *Low* will judge that her current knowledge claims should be assessed in a future context *High*. Therefore, Montminy concludes, if truth relativism about knowledge ascriptions is true, speakers are systematically mistaken about whether their current knowledge claims should be retracted in future contexts.

MacFarlane (2014, 198-199), in turn, argues that the ignorance and resulting error that truth relativism needs to impute to speakers is a reason neither to reject the view nor to consider that it is less well supported by the data than contextualism. As a matter of fact, he claims that the ignorance and error the relativist attributes are less extreme and more easily explainable than the ones contextualists have to attribute. Contextualists would have to give an *ad hoc* explanation of why speakers make mistakes concerning knowledge ascriptions and not others sentences that are supposed to be similar, e.g. those involving expressions like “local” or “ready.” In turn, MacFarlane (2014, 198-199) claims, the relativist is in a much better position to provide an explanation of the ignorance and error she ascribes: she only needs to point out that the ignorance and error she imputes to speakers concerning the commitments they make when making knowledge claims is just an instance of the general ignorance they have and the resulting mistakes they make concerning the full range of things they commit themselves to when making several kinds of intentional acts (e.g. getting married, accepting a job, etc.). I shall address this point later in this section and in the next one.

At present, we must note that Montminy’s remarks uncover a problem deeper than the need to attribute ignorance or error. MacFarlane somehow acknowledges this problem in the following two passages that address Montminy’s objection,

where by *Lower* he understands a future context where a knowledge standard lower than the one relevant in one's current context is in play:

...I do want to acknowledge that there is something odd about judging that, in a future context *Lower*, you ought to retract an assertion that you now regard as accurate –not because you've gotten new evidence, but simply because the contextually relevant alternatives are different. After all, from your present point of view, there is something wrong with the standard governing *Lower*: it counts people who don't know as knowers! It can seem, then, that thinking that you ought to retract your current assertion if you later come to be in *Lower*, is a bit like thinking that you ought to retract your current assertion if you later come to accept misleading evidence against it. (MacFarlane 2014, 199)

If there is a worry here, it cannot *just* be that one might later be compelled to retract an assertion made blamelessly. For that threat is present, I take it, in nearly all of our assertions. It is always possible that one's present evidence for a claim is misleading, and that future evidence against it will reveal this. It would be very odd, however, if one thought it *likely* that such evidence would present itself, but made the assertion regardless. (MacFarlane 2014, 306)

I take it that we can spell out what is odd about the proposal by saying that our monadic accuracy notion –which is derived from the ordinary truth notion- seems to rule out the possibility of considering an *inaccurate (accurate)* knowledge claim as *accurate (inaccurate) at a future context* where a knowledge standard different from the one relevant at our current context is in play. Consequently, it strikes us as odd to consider that at a later context we must retract an assertion we presently judge as accurate. This is ultimately a problem found in providing an explanation in terms of ordinary monadic truth of the non-monadic truth notion relating propositions to contexts of assessment fixing possibly different knowledge standards. To be sure, we can single out a similar difficulty to provide such an explanatory link in most cases for which a relativist treatment has been proposed. However, in the case of knowledge ascriptions there is a special impediment to provide an explanatory link that arguably motivates Montminy's and MacFarlane's observations.

To see what this impediment is, it proves useful, following a suggestion by MacFarlane (2014, 307-311), to spell out Montminy's critical observation as a problem concerning speakers' rationality. Consider the following plausible principle governing rational belief and sincere assertion:

*Rational Belief and Assertion:*

One cannot rationally believe/assert sincerely proposition  $p$  now if one expects (is *certain* or *almost certain*) to be later justified (at a later context) to think that this belief token/assertion was inaccurate.<sup>12</sup>

Given that different knowledge standards are taken to be determined by practical or conversational factors across contexts, the relativist is committed to say that, in case one knows how knowledge claims are to be assessed across contexts, in making a knowledge claim in a low (high) stakes context one can be *all but certain* that one will later occupy a high (low) stakes context at which the claim is inaccurate and from which one will ought to retract it. Thus, the relativist needs to either attribute irrationality and error to speakers (i.e. they would violate *Rational Belief and Assertion*) or claim that they ignore how knowledge claims are to be assessed across contexts. As we shall see next, both options prevent her from answering the linking problem.<sup>13</sup>

In chapter 4 we argued that we have to make sense of the notion of *right context of assessment* in order to solve this problem. It could be thought that this notion can

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<sup>12</sup> This principle is formulated in terms of sincere assertion and not just of assertion because it can be rational for a speaker to assert something that she knows is false.

<sup>13</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 309) argues that in order to face Montminy's objection the relativist should endorse, instead of *Rational Belief and Assertion*, a principle like the following one:

*Rational Belief and Assertion\*:*

One cannot rationally believe/assert sincerely proposition  $p$  at context  $c$  if one expects (is *certain* or *almost certain*) to be later justified (at a later context) to think that this belief/assertion was inaccurate at  $c$ .

That is: an agent in  $c$  cannot rationally believe/assert sincerely  $p$  if  $p$  is false as used at  $c$  and assessed from  $c$ .

MacFarlane thusly introduces technical non-monadic truth and accuracy notions in the formulation of the rationality principle governing belief and assertion and, accordingly, ignores the linking problem. More precisely, he does not consider necessary to explain the pull of the principle *Rational Belief and Assertion*, which appeals to non-technical notions of truth and accuracy. Recall that, as we saw in chapter 3, the relativist should state the truth norm of assertion (and belief) that speakers expressly follow using a non-technical and allegedly assessment sensitive truth notion. Accordingly, any rationality principle concerning accuracy (i.e. a truth-derived notion) that speakers could *expressly* follow should be stated using the ordinary monadic notion of accuracy.

be applied in the present case, since the assessor –as MacFarlane (2014, 199) suggests- is meant to endorse the knowledge standard relevant at her context, and so she could be seen as taking this standard as the right one. Be that as it may, we cannot make sense of this notion if we assume both *Rational Belief and Assertion* and that speakers know how knowledge claims are to be assessed across different contexts. Under both of these assumptions, an agent behaves irrationally in taking the context at which she sincerely asserts or believes a proposition that ascribes or denies knowledge as a right context of assessment, since she is *all but certain* that she will later be justified in endorsing a different knowledge standard from the one in play in that context. To be sure, the relativist can try to vindicate speakers' rationality by postulating that in sincerely making knowledge claims (believing propositions ascribing or denying knowledge) they ignore that such assertions (belief tokens) are to be assessed differently across contexts. But this option also makes the linking problem unanswerable.

As we pointed out, MacFarlane (2014, 198-199) thinks that truth relativism is not undermined by the need to impute ignorance to speakers, since the imputed ignorance would be less problematic and easier to explain than the one contextualism needs to attribute; after all, we are usually unaware of all the things we are committing ourselves to when making an intentional act. But as a matter of fact, the ignorance relativism needs to ascribe is more problematic, since attributing such an ignorance amounts to acknowledging the impossibility of providing an explanatory link between the ordinary monadic truth notion and the non-monadic theoretical one, so that one can be justified in taking the latter as a truth notion. We cannot have such a link if in order for one to rationally and sincerely apply the ordinary notion one needs to ignore the legitimacy of the theoretical non-monadic one. Recall that, as we saw in chapters 3 and 4, in order to make sense of the relativist non-monadic truth notion we should provide an explanatory link between this notion and ordinary monadic truth by means of using these notions. Thus, granting that one needs to ignore the legitimacy of the theoretical notion to rationally and sincerely apply the monadic one –just like granting that one is irrational in applying the monadic notion if one is aware of the legitimacy of the non-monadic one- amounts to conceding that there is no proper explanatory link between these two notions. One cannot, then,

defend the legitimacy of the notion of knowledge standard-assessment sensitive truth by appealing to a speakers' ignorance or error hypothesis.<sup>14</sup>

The specific problem found in answering the linking problem in the present case derives from the way in which a knowledge standard would be contextually fixed and endorsed. A standard of knowledge is supposed to be in play at a given context because of certain practical or conversational factors, e.g. the practical matters at stake, the operant conversational purposes and presuppositions or the epistemic possibilities that have been mentioned or considered. Accordingly, speakers would regularly occupy contexts where different knowledge standards are in play and they would endorse such standards because they are practically or conversationally relevant at the context they occupy. As far as the pragmatic explanation accepted by relativists goes, then, there is nothing in how these factors operate to fix a knowledge standard that licenses someone to use the standard relevant at her context to assess assertions made from other contexts at which other knowledge standards are in play. We can be seen as endorsing a knowledge standard but –insofar as we do not impute ignorance or error to speakers- in an explicitly context related way: we endorse it, say, for the purposes of the conversation or given the practical issues at stake. How are we then supposed to be entitled to take our knowledge standard as cross-contextually superior, and so to assess assertions made from contexts where other such standards are in play using the knowledge standard in play in our context? Answering that we just happen to do that does not help, since our aim is to make sense of truth as assessment sensitive. Accordingly, simply claiming that our context is a right context of assessment without further ado is also unsatisfactory insofar as it leaves the notion of *right context of assessment* unexplained, and trying to spell it out in a case-by-case basis is the task we set ourselves to accomplish.

The previous paragraph suggests that truth relativism about knowledge ascriptions is in a worse position than truth relativism about personal taste, moral or aesthetic predicates (i.e. the expressions I class as *idiosyncratically evaluative*). In the case of these predicates, competent speakers are not supposed to (more or less) regularly occupy different contexts where different standards are practically or

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<sup>14</sup> Besides, such an ignorance or error hypothesis is implausible in some cases. Suppose that one is taking a class on philosophical skepticism where the knowledge standard is significantly high. Outside the classroom, where lower knowledge standards are in play, one makes regular knowledge claims. On a truth relativist view, *Rational Belief and Assertion* is vindicated insofar as it is assumed that one ignores that during the class these assertions will count as inaccurate. But given that one is used to occupy both types of contexts, it is implausible to say that one is completely unaware of this.

conversationally relevant. Instead, a moral, taste or aesthetic standard is relevant at a context because of a more or less permanent endorsement of such a standard. We could try to spell out this difference as a difference between sincere assertions and beliefs that presuppose the agent's belief that his current standard is, in some sense, cross-contextually better than others and those that merely involve the agent's recognition that an object or individual satisfies a standard that is relevant for the purposes of a conversation or given the practical matters at stake. In this respect, the case of knowledge ascriptions is similar to most cases for which contextualist treatments have been widely accepted. Assertive utterances of simple sentences containing "ready," for instance, are taken to be accurate or inaccurate with respect to a purpose relevant at the context of utterance, and it strikes us as wrong to say that such claims express the speaker's belief that this purpose is cross-contextually better than others. As we shall see in chapter 8, this difference between "know(s)" –as well as other expressions that behave in a similar way- and idiosyncratically evaluative predicates can be seen as making a relativist treatment of the latter *prima facie* more plausible than a relativist treatment of the former.

I conclude that the alleged advantage of truth relativism over contextualism about knowledge ascriptions vanishes on close scrutiny. However, it can be claimed that contextualism is in a pretty bad position as well, given that it also has to appeal to a problematic ignorance and error hypothesis. In the next section I argue that non-indexical contextualism about knowledge ascriptions fares better than truth relativism in this respect.

#### **6.4. Non-indexical contextualism and the evidence**

As we have seen, truth relativism about knowledge ascriptions has to appeal to an ignorance hypothesis that casts doubt on the legitimacy of the very notion of knowledge standard-assessment sensitivity. Still, it can be claimed, contextualism of any sort about "know(s)" also needs to accept a problematic ignorance and error hypothesis. According to MacFarlane (2014, 198-199), contextualists have to give an *ad hoc* explanation of the mistakes speakers make regarding whether two knowledge claims disagree with each other or when a knowledge claim must be retracted, since they do not make such mistakes in other cases that are supposed to be similar (e.g.

those involving expressions like “ready” or “local”). Granting, for the sake of argument, the criticisms that were addressed specifically against indexical contextualism, in this section I argue that non-indexical contextualism about “know(s)” may not need to appeal to such an ignorance and error hypothesis at all.<sup>15</sup>

To begin with, it is worth mentioning the alleged advantages of non-indexical contextualism over indexical contextualism. Firstly, it need not appeal to an ignorance and error hypothesis to explain reports and inter-contextual truth-value assessments, unlike indexical contextualism. As we saw in the first chapter, non-indexical contextualism yields the same results concerning such reports and assessments as truth relativism does. Secondly, a non-indexical contextualist could explain a speaker’s incapacity to specify the contextually relevant knowledge standard –and so face Schiffer’s (1996, 326-327) objection- by claiming that it is not part of the content of her assertion, as it happens in the case of utterances of simple sentences containing “ready” or “local.” And anyhow, non-indexical contextualism does not do worse than truth relativism in this respect: both positions arguably have at their disposal similar explanations of such an incapacity to specify the contextually relevant standard, regardless of which context each position takes as fixing this standard. Still, a relativist could claim, non-indexical contextualism needs to appeal to a problematic error hypothesis to explain certain apparent disagreements and retractions involving knowledge ascriptions. But this alleged evidence is not persuasive.

There is reason to put the adduced disagreement data into question, since we have trouble to apply the disagreement categories conferring support on truth relativism in the present case. To begin with, truth relativism about knowledge ascriptions cannot adduce the existence of apparent intractable disputes constituting evidence for intractable disagreements (i.e. disagreements that cannot in principle be solved by rational means).<sup>16</sup> According to the usual explanations –including MacFarlane’s and Richard’s (2004, 2008 166-176)- of how a given knowledge

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<sup>15</sup> Nikola Kompa (2002) can be seen as defending a non-indexical contextualist proposal on knowledge ascriptions, despite the fact that she calls her position “relativist.” On Kompa’s (2002, 88) view, “know(s)” expresses the same relation across contexts but this relation is *unspecific* in the sense that what counts as knowledge can vary with the context of use. As MacFarlane (2009, 237-238) points out, the natural way of spelling out Kompa’s view is to conceive of “know(s)” as knowledge-standard neutral and add a knowledge-standard parameter to the circumstances of evaluation whose value is to be fixed by the context of use.

<sup>16</sup> As we shall see in chapter 8, in the case of idiosyncratically evaluative predicates there are apparent intractable disputes that can be taken as evidence for the existence of intractable disagreements.

standard can become contextually relevant, when someone appropriately brings up a possibility as relevant for the purposes of a conversation,<sup>17</sup> the other members of the conversation have to accept that contextual change insofar as they are rational competent speakers. This means that any dispute involving knowledge ascriptions, as well as any disagreement it could manifest, is not intractable. In turn, if the allegedly disagreeing parties occupied locationally or temporally distant contexts, one could solve or dissolve an apparent disagreement by asking each party to reason how she should behave if she were to have an actual dispute with the other party.

To be sure, the relativist could still claim that there are apparent *faultless disagreements* when two speakers make incompatible knowledge claims from contexts where different knowledge standards are in play.<sup>18</sup> But as we suggested in the introduction, the category of faultless disagreement faces the same problem as truth relativism itself. That is, in order to make sense of this category we need an answer to the linking problem. Such an answer would provide us with an understanding of the non-monadic truth and accuracy notions in terms of which we intend to see two conflicting assertions (belief tokens), as well as the individuals who make (have) them, as being faultless (i.e. two conflicting assertions/belief tokens would be faultless insofar as each of them is accurate as assessed from the respective contexts where they are made/held).

In turn, regarding retraction, it could be argued that it is natural to assertively utter sentences like “I was wrong” or “I was mistaken” after a contextual change that renders false a previously asserted proposition ascribing or denying knowledge, and that such utterances seem to show that we are assessing our previous assertion as inaccurate in light of the standard currently in play in our context.<sup>19</sup> Be that as it may, it is not clear that such utterances are commonly found in everyday talk, and it is not natural to make them in some cases where the relativist predicts that retraction is justified from someone’s context. Imagine the case of a professor lecturing

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<sup>17</sup> I am not taking any stance on what it takes for a speaker to *appropriately* bring a possibility up. It could be that just mentioning a possibility, without further reason to do so, suffices to change the contextually relevant standard.

<sup>18</sup> Recall that as we characterized faultless disagreements in the introduction, they involve preclusion of joint accuracy and so could not be accounted for by non-indexical contextualism.

<sup>19</sup> Notice in this regard that (i) since “accuracy” as it is used here is a technical term, there are no uses of this term that constitute evidence for retraction, and (ii) when sentences like “I take that back,” “I retract that” or “that is false” are used, “that” may refer to the proposition asserted and not to the assertion itself. This means that sentences like “I was wrong” or “I was mistaken” may represent the only ones whose use constitute clear evidence for retraction.

epistemology that, after several skeptical considerations of a philosophical sort, asserts that she does not know she has hands. When later she is in a low-stakes context where she is willing to say that she knows she has hands, is it natural for her to claim that she was wrong before? I believe the answer is negative.

According to the considerations we made, non-indexical contextualism about knowledge ascriptions may not need to appeal to an ignorance and error hypothesis that explains why speakers wrongly act as if their knowledge claims were assessment sensitive. Having said this, we have to note that non-indexical contextualism, unlike truth relativism and indexical contextualism, can be accused of not according well with the natural assessment of sentences where “know(s)” is counterfactually or temporally embedded.

On a relativist view, I use the knowledge standard prevailing in my context to assess for truth a proposition or sentence in a counterfactual or past situation, and this seems correct. If I am in a low standard context, I do not reason that I would know that my wallet was not stolen if a high standard were in play, or that I did not know that my wallet had not been stolen yesterday night when such a standard was in play. Accordingly, we assess (4) and (5) as false:

- (4) If I were in a high stakes context, I would not know –as I know now based on the same evidence- that my wallet was not stolen.<sup>20</sup>
- (5) When I was in a high stakes context yesterday night, I did not know –as I know now based on the same evidence- that my wallet had not been stolen.

An indexical contextualist view can explain such assessments as well: the knowledge standard in play at the context of use is built into the content of a sentence containing “know(s)” no matter whether the world or time is shifted. But it can be argued that the non-indexical contextualist should assess sentences like (4) and (5) as true.

Let us consider the case of (4). On a no-indexical contextualist view I should, from my low stakes context, judge that someone occupying a high stakes context is accurate in asserting that I do not know that my wallet was not stolen (because of the asserted alternatives-neutral proposition being true at this latter context), and

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<sup>20</sup> We are assuming that in shifting the world we are not changing the facts about my wallet’s whereabouts. After all, it is commonly assumed that in order to assign a truth-value to a counterfactual conditional we need to determine whether the consequent is true in the closest world(s) (i.e. in the world(s) that are most similar to the actual world) where the antecedent is true.

accordingly I should also judge that if I were to occupy a high stakes context I would be accurate in asserting this same proposition. But this would commit us to assess (4) as true since, assuming that I am now in a low stakes context, it seems that I cannot take myself to be accurate in making such a claim at a high stakes context if I consider that at that context I would know that my wallet was not stolen. Therefore, the fact that we do assess (4) in light of the knowledge standard in play at our context can be seen as speaking against a non-indexical contextualist treatment of knowledge ascriptions. Analogous comments can be made about (5).

Be that as it may, the falsehood of (4) and (5) is not, strictly speaking, inconsistent with a non-indexical contextualist account of knowledge ascriptions. The alleged tension between this view and our assessments of sentences like (4) and (5) can be taken as an instance of the divorce that non-indexical contextualist views introducing in the circumstances some non-world parameter establish between simple truth and simple accuracy. For such views, someone (in the actual world) can be accurate in asserting a false proposition: whereas the accuracy of the assertion is evaluated relative to the context where it takes place, the truth of the proposition is evaluated relative to my present context, and so when these two contexts differ truth and accuracy can come apart. I can take someone to be accurate in assertively uttering that I know that my wallet was not stolen despite being true that I do not know (relative to my context) that my wallet was not stolen and so –since truth satisfies the *Equivalence Schema*<sup>21</sup>– despite not knowing this. As we explained in the first chapter, taking into account the technicality of the word “accuracy” can assuage the worries that this divorce between truth and accuracy generates. Accordingly, once one has accepted this divorce, one has reason for not being too worry about the present result concerning temporal and counterfactual embeddings.<sup>22</sup>

To conclude, if we are moved by the objections presented against indexical contextualism and truth relativism, a non-indexical contextualist treatment of “know(s)” looks plausible.

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<sup>21</sup> Recall that this schema states the following: the proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ . Or, in formal vocabulary:  $\forall x ((x = \text{the proposition that } p) \supset (\text{true}(x) \equiv p))$ .

<sup>22</sup> To be sure, taking the natural assessments of sentences like (4) and (5) as legitimate prevents the non-indexical contextualist from endorsing one of the linking explanations available to her that we considered in chapter 4. This proposal is the one that consists in taking *truth* as equivalent to *truth at c* (one’s own context), and explaining the *truth at c*’ (a context one does not occupy) of a proposition  $p$  that is false at one’s context by means of a counterfactual along the lines of ‘ $p$  would be true if I were in  $c$ .’ But if we take  $p$  to stand for a knowledge-ascribing proposition, the natural assessment of such counterfactuals is as false.

## 7

**Epistemic Modals**

It is acknowledged that modal words are commonly used to express epistemic possibility or necessity (uncertainty or certainty), i.e. they are used as *epistemic modals*.<sup>1</sup> Among these words we find auxiliaries like “might,” “could” and “must,” adjectives like “possible,” “probable” and “necessary,” and adverbs like “possibly,” “probably” and “necessarily.” The truth-value of the propositions expressed by common utterances of declarative sentences containing these words would depend on the possibilities left open by a certain *epistemic state* (typically the knowledge) of some individual or group.<sup>2</sup> For instance, it is assumed that the proposition expressed in context by a sentence ‘It might be that *S*’ is true iff there is at least one epistemic possibility in which the proposition *S* expresses is true, and the proposition expressed in context by a sentence ‘It must be that *S*’ is true iff the proposition *S* expresses is true in every such possibility.<sup>3</sup> Examples of sentences where such expressions are naturally understood in an epistemic way are the following:

- (1) The treasure *might/must* be under the palm tree.
- (2) It is *possible/probable* that I have passed the test.
- (3) He is *possibly/probably* my father.

Despite the wide spread agreement about the epistemic nature of most uses of these sentences, there is little agreement on which truth conditions the contents

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<sup>1</sup> To be sure, there are other uses of these words that express, for instance, metaphysical, logical or nomological possibility or necessity.

<sup>2</sup> One clarification is in order. What counts as knowledge may well vary with the context of use or assessment, and this may have an effect on our final theory of epistemic modals. However, in considering how to deal with epistemic modals we leave this issue aside.

<sup>3</sup> Following Angelika Kratzer (1981) these possibilities are usually seen as possible worlds that have a certain accessibility relation to the actual world. The kind of accessibility relation varies depending on how we use the modal expression, e.g. as a metaphysical, logical, nomological or epistemic modal. Modals, in turn, are seen as quantifying over this set of accessible worlds. Generally put, the truth-value of a proposition *modal:p* at world *w* is taken to depend on the truth-value that *p* has at the worlds accessible from *w*.

expressed by using them have, or even on whether these contents have truth conditions at all.<sup>4</sup> As Andy Egan (2011, 222) notices, among those who defend a truth-conditional approach the two crucial questions are (i) whose epistemic state is relevant for determining the truth-value of the content of an epistemic modal claim (i.e. an assertion of a proposition expressed in context by a sentence containing an epistemic modal), and (ii) which is exactly the epistemic state relevant for determining the set of open possibilities. Here I will address mainly the first point, since the debate over truth relativism in this area has been naturally focused on it.

We shall consider two puzzles that reveal different features of our use of epistemic modals and have received some attention in the recent literature on the subject: a variant of the puzzle presented by Andy Egan, John Hawthorne and Brian Weatherson (2005, 132-134) and a variant of a puzzle presented by MacFarlane (2011d, 147; 2014, 240-242). Considering both puzzles will help us to stress different aspects of the views on epistemic modals that we shall consider.

In the first section I introduce the puzzles. In the second one I present the problems that they raise for indexical contextualism, which is the orthodox view on epistemic modals. In the third section I explain why truth relativism would solve both puzzles, whereas non-indexical contextualism would only solve the first one. In the fourth section, based on an objection by Richard Dietz (2008), I argue that truth relativism about epistemic modals has no way out of the linking problem. Finally, in the fifth and last section I contend that this objection casts doubt on the legitimacy of the linguistic data allegedly revealed by the second puzzle, and suggest a non-indexical contextualist way of explaining away such data. I conclude that, if one accepts the data adduced against indexical contextualism, one has reason for going non-indexical contextualist.

Before starting, it is worth pointing out that MacFarlane (2014, 280-304) defends a truth relativist treatment of “ought” as it is used in practical deliberation that is dependent on a truth relativist view on epistemic modals. This dependence is due to the fact that, when we deliberate about what to do, we inevitably think about epistemic likelihoods. Thus, the considerations concerning a relativist treatment of epistemic modals put forward in this chapter are directly relevant for an evaluation of truth relativism about deliberative uses of “ought.”

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<sup>4</sup> For an expressivist account of epistemic modals see Huw Price (1983).

### 7.1. The puzzles

I call my variant of the puzzle introduced by Egan et al. (2005) “*Puzzle 1*,” and my variant of MacFarlane’s puzzle “*Puzzle 2*.” Both puzzles concern the word “might,” but analogous puzzles can be formulated using “possible” or “possibly.”

#### *Puzzle 1:*

Two celebrity reporters are on television wondering where Professor Granger is. One of them says to the other: “Myles, where is Professor Granger?” Myles answers with the following words: “She might be in Prague. She was planning to travel there, and no one here knows whether she ended up there or whether she changed her plans at the last minute.” In turn, Professor Granger happens to be in Bora Bora watching these reporters having the previous conversation on television. It seems to her that what Myles says is somehow wrong, but it is not clear to her where the problem lies. What Myles says by means of his second sentence seems clearly true to her since she did not tell anyone where she was going, and its truth seems to be a sufficient basis for Myles to assertively utter the first sentence, i.e. “She might be in Prague.” Trying to find out where the problem lies, she runs through the following reasoning:

- (i) In assertively uttering “She might be in Prague” Myles says that I might be in Prague.
- (ii) In assertively uttering “She might be in Prague” Myles says something true if neither he nor any of his work colleagues know that I am not in Prague.<sup>5</sup>
- (iii) Neither Myles nor his work colleagues know that I am not in Prague.

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<sup>5</sup> I have made two changes to the original version of this point. First, Egan et al. (2005, 132) use a biconditional instead of a conditional. This is not essential to the puzzle they are presenting and it contravenes a feature of our linguistic use that *Puzzle 2* shows, namely that speakers are ready to make epistemic modal claims based on their own personal knowledge (in the original version the knowledge of Myles’s colleagues is necessarily relevant for the truth of what he says). Since this is a feature of our linguistic usage that I will consider in this chapter, I chose to slightly change the original version of the first puzzle to make (ii) compatible with it. Second, I use the phrase “says something true” instead of “speaks truly,” as Egan et al. (2005) use. Whereas the former is clearly about the content of a speech act, the latter may be ambiguous between a reading on which it is about the content of a speech act and a reading on which it alludes to the speech act itself. This distinction is relevant for our purposes and Egan et al. (2005) adopt the former reading. I have made the same change in point (iv).

- (iv) If Myles says something true when he says that I might be in Prague, then I might be in Prague.
- (v) I know that I am not in Prague.
- (vi) It is not the case that I know I am not in Prague if I might be in Prague.

As far as Professor Granger (and I) can see, (i) to (vi) are jointly inconsistent: (ii) and (iii) entail that Myles says something true when he assertively utters “She might be in Prague;” from this and (i) it follows that Myles asserts that Professor Granger might be in Prague and that what he asserts is true; from this and (iv) it follows that Professor Granger might be in Prague; and finally this combined with (v) is inconsistent with (vi). But at the same time, each one of these sentences expresses something plausible when reasoning about the story just presented.

To make the puzzle more pressing, Egan et al. (2005, 133) notice that there is no single person or group whose epistemic state we can choose in running our previous reasoning without having unpalatable consequences. If the relevant information is the one Myles has or the one resulting from somehow combining what he and the people around him know, it seems that what is expressed by using “She might be in Prague” is true and we cannot block the inconsistent reasoning running from (i) to (vi). On the other hand, if the relevant information is the one Professor Granger has or the one resulting from somehow combining what she and the people around her know, it seems that what is expressed by using the previous sentence is false and it becomes mysterious why competent speakers use epistemic modals like “might.” Given that –as it is here assumed– Professor Granger and the people surrounding her know where she is, what is expressed by using “Professor Granger might be in Prague” (or “I might be in Prague” if Granger is the user) would be true iff what is expressed by using “Professor Granger is in Prague” (or “I am in Prague”) is true. But this result arguably shows that we have made a mistake: saying the former thing is a way of not saying something as strong as the latter thing, and that would not be possible if the just stated biconditional were true.

*Puzzle 2:*

We can change a little the story just told to construct a Macfarlane's type of puzzle. Suppose that Myles's interlocutor, Lucy, is an old friend of Professor Granger and, having just spoken to her on the phone, has recently come to know where Granger is. Thus, imagine that instead of the previous conversation the following one takes place between the reporters:

Myles: Professor Granger might be in Prague. She was planning to travel there, and I do not know whether she ended up there or whether she changed her plans at the last minute.

Lucy: No, she cannot be in Prague. I have just spoken to her on the phone and she told me she is in Bora Bora.

Myles: Oh, so I guess I was wrong.

It seems that Lucy both contradicts what Myles asserts by means of uttering "Professor Granger might be in Prague" and rejects this assertion,<sup>6</sup> that she is entitled to do these things given what she knows and that Myles correctly admits he was wrong and retracts his first assertion. However, it also seems that Myles's first claim was appropriate given what he knew when he made it, and there is a strong presumption that appropriate uses of "might" result in accurate assertions. How can, then, an accurate assertion be correctly retracted by its asserter and correctly rejected by another speaker?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kai von Fintel and Anthony S. Gilles (2008, 83-84) argue that in a case like the one just presented we should read Lucy's "No" as addressing the proposition that Professor Granger is in Prague, not the proposition that she might be in Prague. As MacFarlane (2014, 240) shows, this is not a plausible way of dealing with the case. He asks us to compare a case like the one we presented with the following one, where it is clear that what is being negated is the proposition that B is leaving California and not the proposition that it is rumored that this is so:

A: It is rumored that you are leaving California.

B: No, that's false.

This case is different from the one from *Puzzle 2* in two important respects: (i) whereas B would be ready to deny that she is leaving California but not that it is rumored that this is so, Lucy would be ready to deny both that Granger is in Prague and that she might be there, and (ii) whereas it would be odd for A to admit she was wrong, Myles's admission sounds natural.

<sup>7</sup> To be sure, the puzzle as it stands may not seem very pressing. After all, we can hold that the relevant epistemic state is the one resulting from somehow combining the knowledge of the interlocutors. As a result, Myles's first claim would turn out to be inaccurate despite being a reasonable assumption for him to make that Lucy –who, we may assume, is his close acquaintance–

As MacFarlane (2014, 241) points out, any view on epistemic modals must provide an answer to this conundrum by means of answering (or dissolving) the following questions:

*Warrant question:* On what basis did Myles take himself to be warranted in making his first claim?

*Rejection question:* On what basis did Lucy take herself to be warranted in rejecting Myles's first claim as incorrect?

*Retraction question:* On what basis did Myles concede that he was wrong after Lucy's remark? What did he learn from Lucy that made him take back his first claim?

Each puzzle reveals different aspects of our use of epistemic modals. *Puzzle 1* shows that (a) we can report any epistemic modal claim by using the same epistemic modal as the speaker used and without making any allusion to her information state, e.g. we judge that if a competent speaker utters 'It might be that  $S$ ' and  $S$  means that  $p$  at the context in which it is uttered, then the speaker said that it might be that  $p$ ;<sup>8</sup> and (b) we respect the *Equivalence Schema* (i.e. the proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ ) when drawing inferences from the truth of what someone said by means of using an epistemic modal, e.g. we judge that if somebody said that it might be that  $p$  and what she said is true, then it might be that  $p$ . Whereas (a) is assumed in point (i) in the reasoning from *Puzzle 1*, (b) is assumed in point (iv). In addition, point (ii) from this puzzle assumes that epistemic modal propositions that are warranted given the background information relevant at the context of use are also true.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, *Puzzle 2* would show that (a) we can strongly disagree by making epistemic modal claims and we can correctly retract such claims, and (b) we see speakers (and speakers take themselves) as entitled to make epistemic modal claims based on their own personal knowledge. In turn, *Puzzle 1* leaves open whether our personal knowledge is a sufficient basis for making warranted epistemic modal claims.

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did not know where Granger was. However, as we shall see in the next section, eavesdropper cases (Egan 2007, 2-5; MacFarlane 2014, 244-245) undermine such a contextualist answer to this puzzle.

<sup>8</sup> Note that  $S$  may contain indexically context sensitive expressions, and so we cannot assume that it can be disquoted in a report.

<sup>9</sup> Egan et al. (2005) ultimately question this last assumption –at least in cases where the context of use differs from the context of assessment- and defend a truth relativist view on epistemic modals.

In the last section I shall question the legitimacy of the disagreement and retraction data that *Puzzle 2* is meant to show.

## 7.2. Indexical contextualism

In this section I consider two versions of indexical contextualism (i.e. the view that takes an epistemic modal sentence as expressing, across contexts of use, possibly different propositions about different epistemic states) that differ in whose epistemic state they take as tacitly alluded to by an epistemic modal sentence in context: *solipsistic indexical contextualism* and *collective indexical contextualism*.

According to the first view, the alluded epistemic state is always the knowledge the speaker (user) has. For instance, an utterance of “Professor Granger might be in Prague” is taken to express that the speaker’s knowledge does not rule out Granger being in Prague. Accordingly, the proposal gives a simple explanation of speakers’ willingness to make epistemic modal claims based on their own personal knowledge, i.e. it offers a simple answer to the warrant question. Myles’s first natural and seemingly appropriate intervention in the case from *Puzzle 2* is straightforwardly explained by the fact that he ignores that Granger is not in Prague.<sup>10</sup> But in doing this, the proposal is committed to say that Lucy is mistaken in denying what Myles says and rejecting his assertion and that Myles is also mistaken in admitting he was wrong. What Lucy denies and Myles judges as false when admitting he was wrong would be a true proposition about Myles’s own knowledge at the time he made his first claim. Thus, relativists argue that this proposal must impute error to speakers in a way that is not properly justified: why should we privilege the data on when speakers take themselves to be warranted in making epistemic modal claims over the data on assessments made by other speakers or the same speaker at later contexts? As MacFarlane (2014, 241-242) argues, this view makes the rejection and retraction questions impossible to answer satisfactorily.

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<sup>10</sup> The view has some other virtues. As MacFarlane (2011d, 145; 2014, 239) notices, it provides a straightforward explanation of why sentences like “Granger might be in Prague, but I know he is not” or “Granger might be in Prague, but he is not” sound paradoxical. Whereas the first sentence would express a contradiction (when the first conjunct expresses a truth the second one expresses a falsehood), uses of the second one would be pragmatically infelicitous (in asserting that Granger is not in Prague one represents oneself as knowing this, contrary to what the first conjunct expresses).

In turn, concerning *Puzzle 1* the proposal arguably deems (i) (i.e. In assertively uttering “She might be in Prague” Myles says that I might be in Prague) false. To report what Myles said by means of “She might be in Prague,” Granger uses the sentence “I might be in Prague,” and so she would be falsely saying that Myles expressed a proposition about what is an open possibility given her own knowledge. This proposal, thus, would need to hold that speakers make systematic mistakes when reporting epistemic modal claims. More precisely, given that it is implausible that we mistakenly think that others say and believe bizarre things about our own knowledge, the proposal would have to impute to speakers wide spread semantic error concerning say-that reports (as well as several other kinds of reports<sup>11</sup>), i.e. they would be usually unaware of what they are saying when making them. And again, it is not clear why in devising a theory of natural language we should do justice to the data about speakers’ willingness to make epistemic modal claims and not to the data about third parties reports on what has been said.<sup>12</sup>

Collective indexical contextualism, our second variant of indexical contextualism, represents the orthodox view on epistemic modals. The basic idea defining this proposal is that the epistemic state being alluded to is pragmatically fixed and can extend beyond the speaker’s knowledge (or, more generally, the user’s knowledge). More precisely, we can take the knowledge of all parties to a conversation (in a case where someone just entertains an epistemic modal thought in isolation, we just take her knowledge) as the one alluded to. According to this, the speaker (user) is commonly included in the relevant epistemic group whose knowledge is taken to determine whether a given possibility (e.g. professor Granger being in Prague) is open.<sup>13</sup>

This view *prima facie* contravenes –just as solipsistic indexical contextualism does- our practice of reporting epistemic modals claims, since often the attributor is

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth pointing out that, as Egan et al. (2005, 136-137) notice, we cannot face *Puzzle 1* by claiming that when we make say-that reports we use epistemic modals in a quotational way, since other versions of *Puzzle 1* can be formulated using other kinds of reports (e.g. belief reports).

<sup>12</sup> It can be argued that once we mention the subject of the attribution, this individual becomes contextually salient and so it is her knowledge the one that is being talked about in the report (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009, 40-42). But this line of answer does not square well with a view that takes “might” to automatically quantify over the alternatives left open by the speaker’s knowledge. The model for such a treatment of “might” is the way an indexical like “I” refers, and this expression does not pragmatically shift its reference when embedded. As we shall see, this answer squares much better with collective indexical contextualism.

<sup>13</sup> Several answers can be given to the question of how a given possibility is ruled out by the knowledge of a group. We are assuming in what follows that if the knowledge of any of the group members rules out a possibility, the knowledge of the group rules it out as well.

not a member of a conversational group including the subject of the attribution. As a result, the subject of the attribution cannot be plausibly taken to have said something about the knowledge of a group including the attributor. Thus, this approach would deem (i) from *Puzzle 1* false. To be sure, it can be argued that this problem can be solved by taking the knowledge of the subject of the attribution as contextually salient, given that this subject is mentioned in the report (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009, 40-42). But this explanation of our reporting practice faces some problems in the present case.

One consequence of this explanation is that, insofar as Granger does not equivocate when going through the reasoning from *Puzzle 1*, (vi) (i.e. It is not the case that I know I am not in Prague if I might be in Prague) comes out as false, since at the beginning of her reasoning Granger is supposed to use “might” to tacitly talk about the epistemic state of Myles and his conversational partners (Egan et al. 2005, 141-142). This can be seen as a drawback that this response has, since (vi) seems true in the story from *Puzzle 1*. But this response has a more serious problem (after all, Granger could equivocate when reasoning): it leaves unexplained why in the case of sentences where an individual is mentioned but a speech act or propositional attitude is not being reported, the natural reading is not one according to which the relevant knowledge is the one of the mentioned individual. For instance, as Egan and Weatherson (2011, 9) observe, it seems clear that (5) is infelicitous and is not used to express something like (4), despite the individuals mentioned in (5) being salient:

- (4) Those guys are in trouble, but they do not know that they are.
- (5) Those guys are in trouble, but they might not be.

Cases like (5) have motivated what Egan et al. (2005, 135) call the *speaker inclusion constraint (SIC)*, which was first proposed by DeRose (1991). According to this principle, the group whose (collective) epistemic state is tacitly talked about by using an epistemic modal sentence in context always includes the speaker. What makes (5) infelicitous, then, would be that in order to be entitled to assert the first clause the speaker must know that the guys are in trouble, which makes the second clause false. Now, we need to introduce restrictions on *SIC* if we want to account for the behaviour that epistemic modals show –as we saw– when embedded in a that-clause of a speech act or propositional attitude report. And we need to introduce

further restrictions on this principle to take into account occurrences of epistemic modals under the scope of a quantifier: in sentences like “Every student fears that she might have failed” the imposed reading is that, roughly, every student fears that, for all she knows, she might have failed. Introducing all these restrictions seems to be an *ad hoc* move.

Besides, there are two additional problems with accepting *SIC* with restrictions. First, as Egan et al. (2005, 139) point out, we fail to give a satisfactory answer to *Puzzle 1*, since we counterintuitively deem (iv) (i.e. If Myles says something true when he says that I might be in Prague, then I might be in Prague) false. When Myles asserted that Granger might be Prague he expressed a true proposition and so the antecedent of (iv) is true, but the occurrence of “might” in the consequent is not embedded in a that-clause and so –according to *SIC*- the consequent is false. This means that we judge as invalid inferences that seem valid: one cannot, for instance, infer that *Granger might be in Prague* from the premise that *Myles believes that Granger might be in Prague* and the premise that *what Myles believes is true*. Second, as Egan and Weatherson (2011, 10) claim, the natural explanation of *SIC* is that it is part of the meaning of “might” that the speaker is included in the epistemically relevant group just as it is part of the meaning of “we” that it is a first person plural pronoun. But this explanation conflicts with the restrictions we need to put on *SIC* in order to take into account a range of embedded occurrences of “might.” In the case of other indexically context sensitive expressions whose meaning constrain their contents, the constraints hold when the expressions occur in a report’s that-clause or under the scope of a quantifier. For instance, there is no reading of “They say that we will win” or “Every class expects that we will win” where “we” is used to pick out a group that does not include the speaker.

With respect to *Puzzle 2*, collective indexical contextualism can provide some answer to the rejection and retraction questions. A party to a conversation could reject the claim made by another party based on her own knowledge, and so the party who made this claim would have to retract it because of being inaccurate relative to the knowledge of the contextually relevant group, which includes the objector. In this way, this view could explain Lucy’s objection and Myles’s admission in their conversation from *Puzzle 2*: Lucy is entitled to object to Myles’s first claim based on her own knowledge because she is a member of the conversation, and Myles should make his admission for that very same reason. But, as MacFarlane (2014, 244-245)

notices, there is an important cost this view has: it cannot provide a satisfactory answer to the warrant question, since speakers would not be warranted in making epistemic modal claims based only on their own knowledge. Myles's first natural intervention in the case from *Puzzle 2* would be unwarranted, and Myles would be guilty of semantic error in making such a claim based just on his own knowledge.

We can try to face this problem by saying that in the case from *Puzzle 2* it is natural to assume that Lucy is Myles's acquaintance and that Myles may have had some (mistaken) reason to assume that she knows nothing that rules out Granger being in Prague. But, as the eavesdropper cases presented by relativists (Egan 2007, 2-5; 2011, 236-239; MacFarlane 2011d, 151-152; 2014, 244-245) show, it is possible to change the example in ways that make the warrant question unanswerable. For instance, suppose that neither Myles nor Lucy knows about Granger whereabouts, but you have just spoken to her on the phone and came to know that she is in Bora Bora. As it happens, you are not part of the conversation but just an eavesdropper that listens what Myles and Lucy are talking about as you pass by. Still, you seem entitled to make the unexpected intervention shown in the following dialogue.

Myles: Professor Granger might be in Prague. She was planning to travel there, and I do not know whether she ended up there or whether she changed her plans at the last minute.

Lucy: Neither do I.

You: Look, she cannot be in Prague. I have just spoken to her on the phone and she told me that she is in Bora Bora.

Myles: Oh, so I guess I was wrong.

In this case you naturally contradict what Myles said and presumably reject his first assertion based just on your own knowledge about Granger's whereabouts. And your intervention may be impolite but seems accurate. Thus, a collective indexical contextualist would have, in order to vindicate these appearances and be able to answer the rejection and retraction questions, to include you –alongside Lucy and Myles- in the contextually relevant group. But in that case, you would be a member of the conversation just in virtue of being a random eavesdropper, and so the knowledge had by anyone within earshot should be considered as contextually relevant. And even worse, since it seems that anyone having information that rules

out Granger being in Prague would assess what Myles said as false and presumably his claim as inaccurate, no matter where or when these assessments are made (e.g. you could hear a recording of the conversation the next day), we should include in the contextually relevant group whoever happens to consider the issue addressed by Myles's first claim.<sup>14</sup> This scenario makes the warrant question unanswerable, since Myles cannot possibly know or reasonably assume which knowledge about Granger whereabouts all these people have.<sup>15</sup>

As we shall see in the next section, relativists contend that their view offers a simple solution to both puzzles, whereas non-indexical contextualism is only able to provide an answer to *Puzzle 1*.

### 7.3. Truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism

Among the main truth relativist proposals on epistemic modals found in the recent literature there are those that appeal to *de se* or centered contents (Egan et al. 2005; Egan 2007, 2011) and those that do not (MacFarlane 2010, 2011d, 2014, 238-279). These two approaches differ on how they conceive of content but give basically the same answer to the puzzles.

According to a *de se* relativist semantics, declarative sentences express in context *de se* contents that discriminate between possible situations modeled as centered worlds, which in turn are seen as world/time/individual triples.<sup>16</sup> There are

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<sup>14</sup> Kai von Fintel and Anthony S. Gilles (2008, 86) argue against this reasoning, claiming that rejection intuitions vanish as time passes. According to them, in case Detective Parker were to read now an old transcript of a court case where Al Capone utters "The loot might be in the safe," it would be utterly odd for him to utter "Al was wrong/What Al said is false. The safe was cracked by Geraldo in the 80s and there was nothing inside." But, as MacFarlane (2014, 245) points out, the reason why this would be odd seems to be that it is unclear what purpose Detective Parker could have for saying this. Notice that it would be also odd for him to utter "Al was right/What Al said is true. He had no idea where the loot was." And notice also that if we change the example by supposing that Parker is reviewing these transcripts to find out where the loot is, his first utterance seems natural.

<sup>15</sup> It could be thought that the version of collective indexical contextualism we considered is defective because it just consists in widening the relevant epistemic community without questioning the assumption that knowledge is the epistemic state at stake. In this regard, Ian Hacking's (1967) and DeRose (1991) propose to relax the epistemic relation that the relevant individual or group is taken to have to the relevant facts: in addition to (or instead of) focusing on what it is known, we can focus on what the individual or group can come to know by means of, say, a *relevant practicable investigation*. However, this proposal faces basically the same problems as the version of collective indexical contextualism considered in the main text faces to deal with *Puzzle 1* and –as MacFarlane (2014, 246-248) shows- with *Puzzle 2*.

<sup>16</sup> Centered worlds can differ in many respects from one another, and in particular they can differ in

general reasons (i.e. reasons not specifically related to the case of epistemic modals) to prefer a non-*de se* relativist view like MacFarlane's. These reasons have to do with how a genuine relativist should assess sentences where the world or time is shifted. In chapter 4 we argued that the relativist should be able to shift the value of the world parameter independently of the value of some other parameter receiving a relativist treatment. But she cannot do this if she understands circumstances as centered worlds (i.e. representations of possible situations). In the next chapter, in turn, we shall explain why a semantics including individuals in the indices and circumstances yields assessments of sentences where the time is shifted that the relativist should reject. For now, let us present MacFarlane's proposal and see how it deals with the puzzles that concern us.

On MacFarlane's view, there is, at the semantic level, an *information state* parameter in the indices and circumstances of evaluation for respectively defining sentential and propositional truth. Therefore, indices consist of at least a world, an information state and an assignment to the variables, whereas circumstances consist of at least a world and an information state.<sup>17</sup> Information states are represented by sets of worlds, intuitively those possibilities that are open given certain information about the world of the index or circumstance. The worlds in this set are seen, thus, as epistemically accessible from the world of the index or circumstance. Modal words, in turn, quantify over the set of possibilities: modals like "might" are treated as existential quantifiers (i.e. for an index  $i$  and indices  $i'$  that differ from  $i$  at most in containing a different world that is accessible from the world of  $i$ , a sentence 'It might be that  $S$ ' is true at a context and index  $\langle c, i \rangle$  iff  $S$  is true at a pair  $\langle c, i' \rangle$ ), whereas modals like "must" are treated as universal quantifiers (i.e. for an index  $i$  and indices  $i'$  that differ from  $i$  at most in containing a different world that is accessible from the world of  $i$ , a sentence 'It must be that  $S$ ' is true at a context and

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the epistemic state of the designated individual. On Egan's (2007, 2011) view, a sentence 'It might be that  $S$ ' expresses in a context a *de se* or centered proposition that is true at those centered worlds  $\langle w, t, i \rangle$  where the epistemic state of the individual  $i$  does not rule out the possibility  $S$  expresses in that context, whereas a sentence 'It must be that  $S$ ' expresses in a context a centered proposition that is true at those centered worlds  $\langle w, t, i \rangle$  where the epistemic state of the individual  $i$  rules out the possibility that *not-S* would express in that context. Accordingly, centered propositions would be or determine functions from centered worlds to truth-values. Egan's semantics, like MacFarlane's, is compatible with a non-indexical contextualist and a truth relativist definition of *truth at a context*. Whereas the former takes the centered world contextually relevant for assessing propositions to be fixed by the context of use, the latter sees this world as fixed by the context of assessment.

<sup>17</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 262-264) also includes a time parameter in the circumstances but, as he notices, nothing important hinges on this decision as long as our interest is exclusively focused on epistemic modals.

index  $\langle c, i \rangle$  iff  $S$  is true at all pairs  $\langle c, i' \rangle$ ). In turn, propositions expressed by sentences at contexts are seen as functions from circumstances including an information state to truth-values. According to this semantics, epistemic modals do not make different contributions to propositional content across contexts, since they are not used to talk about an information state.

The semantics just sketched is compatible with both a non-indexical contextualist and a truth relativist definition of *truth at a context*. Whereas the former takes the value of the information state parameter to be fixed by the context of use, the latter definition takes the context of assessment as fixing this parametric value. In particular, on MacFarlane's view an information state is fixed by the context of assessment,<sup>18</sup> whereas a world and a time are fixed by the context of use. As a result, both contexts are relevant to determine the contextually relevant indices and circumstance. According to this proposal, then, the non-indexical and relativist truth definitions run as follows:

*Non indexical contextualist sentential truth:* a sentence  $S$  is true as used at context  $c$  iff for all assignments  $a$ ,  $[[S]]^c \langle w_c, t_c, i_c, a \rangle = \text{True}$ , where  $w_c$  is the world of  $c$ ,  $t_c$  is the time of  $c$ , and  $i_c$  is the information state relevant at  $c$  (e.g. what is known by the agent of  $c$ ).

*Non-indexical contextualist propositional truth:* a proposition  $|S|^c$  is true as used at context  $c$  iff it is true at circumstance of evaluation  $\langle w_c, t_c, i_c, s_c \rangle$ .

*Truth relativist sentential truth:* a sentence  $S$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from context  $c_2$  iff for all assignments  $a$ ,  $[[S]]^{c_1} \langle w_{c_1}, t_{c_1}, i_{c_2}, a \rangle = \text{True}$ , where  $w_{c_1}$  is the world of  $c_1$ ,  $t_{c_1}$  is the time of  $c_1$ , and  $i_{c_2}$  is the information state relevant at  $c_2$  (e.g. what is known by the agent of  $c_2$ ).

*Truth relativist propositional truth:* a proposition  $|S|^{c_1}$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from context  $c_2$  iff it is true at circumstance of evaluation  $\langle w_{c_1}, t_{c_1}, i_{c_2} \rangle$ .

Truth relativism easily vindicates the practice, shown by *Puzzle 1*, of reporting

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<sup>18</sup> As we shall see in the next section, for MacFarlane the information state fixed by the context of assessment often corresponds to the knowledge of the assessor but can also include some information others have.

epistemic modal claims and drawing inferences from the truth of what was said by means of using an epistemic modal. This is a result of the fact that the relativist does not take different epistemic uses of a modal word to express different contents. As we saw, *Puzzle 1* shows that (a) we can report any epistemic modal claim by using the same epistemic modal as the speaker used and without making any allusion to her information state, e.g. we judge that if a competent speaker utters ‘it might be that  $S$ ’ and  $S$  means that  $p$  at the context in which it is uttered, then the speaker said that it might be that  $p$ ;<sup>19</sup> and (b) we respect the *Equivalence Schema* (i.e. the proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ ) when drawing inferences from the truth of what someone said, i.e. we judge that if somebody said that it might be that  $p$  and what she said is true, then it might be that  $p$ . Whereas (a) is assumed in point (i) (i.e. In assertively uttering “She might be in Prague” Myles says that I might be in Prague) in the reasoning from *Puzzle 1*, (b) is assumed in point (iv) (i.e. If Myles says something true when he says that I might be in Prague, then I might be in Prague).

What would then be the problem with Granger’s reasoning? Relativists are committed to say that (ii) (i.e. In assertively uttering “She might be in Prague” Myles says something true if neither he nor any of his work colleagues know that I am not in Prague) is false, since its consequent is false whereas its antecedent is true.<sup>20</sup> Myles did not say something true relative to Granger’s context of assessment (or relative to our own context, since we also know where Granger is), despite the proposition he expressed being true relative to the knowledge had by Myles and his colleagues. However, in spite of deeming (ii) false, truth relativism gives some explanation of why we are tempted to accept it: after all Myles is warranted in making his claim based on the knowledge (i.e. his knowledge and possibly also the one of his colleagues) relevant at his context of assessment.

Non-indexical contextualism can give the same answer to *Puzzle 1*, since it holds that different epistemic uses of a modal expression do not express different contents. As a result, it can also vindicate (a) and (b) above. On the other hand, this view also deems (ii) false for analogous reasons. At Granger’s context of use (i.e. the one in which he goes through her reasoning) as well as at ours (i.e. the one at which

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<sup>19</sup> Note that  $S$  may contain indexically context sensitive expressions, and so we cannot assume that it can be disquoted in a report.

<sup>20</sup> Recall that “true” is taken to express the ordinary monadic truth notion for which the *Equivalence Schema* holds.

we consider (i) to (vi)) the consequent of (ii) is false, whereas its antecedent is true.<sup>21</sup> Besides, non-indexical contextualism can also explain why we tend to accept (ii): Myles is not only warranted but also (absolutely) accurate in making his claim.

*Puzzle 2* is meant to discriminate between truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism, since it would only be adequately faced by the former view. One truth relativist answer to this puzzle is as follows. Assuming that the knowledge of the assessor is the one commonly relevant at a context of assessment, the proposal offers a simple answer to the warrant, rejection and retraction questions. Myles is entitled to claim that Granger might be in Prague, insofar as –given what he knows- this proposition is true as used at and assessed from the context he occupies. In turn, Lucy is entitled to reject Myles’s claim because, given that she knows that Granger is in Bora Bora, from her context of assessment the proposition Myles asserted is false and his assertion inaccurate. Finally, Myles ought to retract his original assertion because, after learning from Lucy that Granger is in Bora Bora, he comes to occupy a new context of assessment relative to which his assertion is inaccurate. More precisely, since the proposition he asserted is false as used at the original context and assessed from Myles’s new context, his assertion is inaccurate relative to this latter context and so it should be retracted.<sup>22</sup>

Why would *Puzzle 2* not be adequately faced by non-indexical contextualism? After all, assuming that the knowledge of the speaker is the one commonly relevant at a context of use, for such a position Myles is entitled to make his first claim and Lucy is entitled to assess the proposition asserted by Myles as false. As Egan (2011, 232-235) points out, arguments specifically aimed at supporting truth relativism about epistemic modals must –like in other cases- rely on data about a strong form of disagreement or on data about retraction. In other words, it is assumed that cases like the one from *Puzzle 2* involve (a) a strong disagreement involving *preclusion of joint accuracy* (i.e. the claims made by the disagreeing parties cannot be jointly accurate) and (b) an act of retracting an assertion as a result of such a disagreement. As we saw

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<sup>21</sup> Recall that truth relativism coincides with non-indexical contextualism in its verdicts on how one should assess propositions for truth, given that in such a case the context of use coincides with the context of assessment. The practical difference between the two views is shown only when we think about how each view holds that one should assess assertions and belief tokens for accuracy. But *Puzzle 1* only deals with assessments of propositions.

<sup>22</sup> Notice that for the relativist it is irrelevant to how Myles should assess his original claim the way in which he came to know where Granger is; the only thing that matters is that he came to know this. In particular, it is irrelevant whether he learns this from a conversational partner.

in the first chapter, non-indexical contextualism can only account for (a') a weaker form of disagreement classed as *doxastic non-cotenability* (i.e. each of the parties cannot sincerely assert or believe the proposition the other party asserts or believes without changing her mind), and only makes room for (b') correct re-assessments at new contexts of use of previously asserted propositions but not for correct retractions of assertions that are accurate at the contexts where they were made.

To be sure, assuming that the common knowledge of a group of interlocutors is the one at stake at a context, the original case from *Puzzle 2* does not clearly discriminate between truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism. Under this assumption, both views take Myles and Lucy to occupy, from the beginning, contexts that coincide in the relevant information state, and both views deem Myles's first claim inaccurate relative to these contexts because of the relevance of Lucy's knowledge. The eavesdropper cases we derived from the original version of *Puzzle 2* are important in this respect, since eavesdroppers are not part of the original conversation.<sup>23</sup> The relativist claims that we need to appeal to the eavesdropper's context of assessment to explain why she –as well as any individual having knowledge that excludes Granger being in Prague- is entitled to reject Myles's assertion.

In the next section I present a problem faced by truth relativism in making sense of information state-assessment sensitivity, whereas in the last section I contend that this problem motivates us to challenge the purported evidence for this view provided by cases like the one from *Puzzle 2*.

#### 7.4. A problem for truth relativism

In the present case, it is possible to make an objection similar to the one we made to truth relativism about knowledge ascriptions. After all, as MacFarlane (2014, 306) notices, a relativist about epistemic modals must say, for instance, that usually when a future mother assertively utters at the beginning of a pregnancy “It might be a boy and it might be a girl,” she is almost certain that in some time she will

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<sup>23</sup> To be sure, in order to practically discriminate her position from non-indexical contextualism, the relativist can also claim that there are disagreements between people who are not members of a single conversation that she, unlike the non-indexical contextualist, can vindicate.

know whether she was pregnant with a boy or a girl, and so she can be almost certain that she will be in an epistemic state relative to which her previous assertion is inaccurate. Thus, we could use the principle *Rational Belief and Assertion*<sup>24</sup> introduced in chapter 6 to make the same objection to a relativist treatment of such an assertion as the one we made to a relativist treatment of knowledge claims. According to this principle, the relativist needs to choose between attributing to our future mother irrationality or ignorance concerning how assertions are to be assessed across contexts, since how can it be rational for her to sincerely make an assertion that she is almost sure she will be justified to judge as inaccurate? And as we saw in chapter 6, both options are problematic for the relativist. Be that as it may, this objection cannot be straightforwardly used against a relativist treatment of most epistemic modal assertions, but only against a relativist treatment of an assertion of a conjunction of epistemic modal propositions that are about mutually exclusive possibilities that the asserter expects to know whether they obtain or not. Regarding most epistemic modal assertions, e.g. Myles's assertive utterance of "Professor Granger might be in Prague," the asserter cannot be almost certain that she will be justified to judge the assertion as inaccurate. After all, the relativist can argue, if Myles came to know that Granger was in Prague, he should assess the just mentioned assertion as accurate.

To be sure, one may think possible, in order to generalize this line of criticism to a relativist treatment of epistemic modal claims, to appeal to a rationality principle that asks for a weaker minimum degree of certainty than *Rational Belief and Assertion* does. Take, for instance, a principle that states that one cannot rationally believe/assert sincerely a certain proposition *p* now if one considers that there is a *good chance* that one will be later justified (at a later context) to think that this belief token/assertion was inaccurate. According to this principle, the relativist should say that a future mother who knows how epistemic modal assertions are to be assessed from different contexts, behaves irrationally not only in assertively and sincerely uttering "It might be a boy and it might be a girl" but also in assertively and sincerely uttering "It might be a boy" or "It might be a girl," insofar as there is, according to her current epistemic state, a good chance (say, a 50% chance) that she will be later

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<sup>24</sup> Recall that this principle states that one cannot rationally believe/assert sincerely *p* now if one expects (is *certain* or *almost certain*) to be later justified (at a later context) to think that this belief token/assertion was inaccurate.

justified to judge the latter assertion as inaccurate. Still, this objection cannot be applied to a relativist treatment of all regular epistemic modal assertions involving “might” or some other similar epistemic modals (e.g. “possible” under an epistemic reading). The reason is that if we wanted to apply this line of criticism to certain assertions involving a use of “might,” we would need to appeal to principles that ask for a very weak minimum degree of certainty, and these principles are not plausible at all. For instance, in the case from *Puzzle 1* Myles could have particular reasons to consider very unlikely that he will be in a position to know whether Granger was in Prague (e.g. Granger could be extremely protective of his private life). In such a scenario, in order to apply this line of criticism to a relativist treatment of Myles’s assertive utterance of “Professor Granger might be in Prague,” we need to appeal to a principle like the following: one cannot rationally believe/sincerely assert proposition *p* now if one considers that there is *some chance (no matter how small)* that one will be later justified (at a later context) to think that this belief token/assertion was inaccurate.<sup>25</sup> But this is an implausible principle.

Be that as it may, the fact that a relativist treatment of certain epistemic modal assertions clashes with some plausible rationality principles casts doubt over truth relativism about epistemic modals. Moreover, I think we can pose a general objection to a relativist treatment of any non-apodeictic epistemic modal claim (i.e. an assertion made by using expressions like “might,” “possible” or “possibly” under an epistemic reading). This objection is based on a critical observation made by Richard Dietz (2008, 250-254) and, if sound, ultimately shows that there is no sense to be made of the notion of information state-assessment sensitivity.

As Dietz (2008, 250) notices, the cases relativists use in formulating puzzles like *Puzzle 2* involve an ill-informed individual (*Ignorant*) that makes a non-apodeictic epistemic modal claim that is assessed and overtly contradicted by a well-informed individual (*Knower*). As a result of *Knower*’s intervention, *Ignorant* comes to know what *Knower* knew from the start and so takes back her original claim. Given this scenario, the relativist diagnosis seems plausible: *Ignorant* performs two acts, an assertion and a retraction of this assertion, and both acts are accurate relative to the

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<sup>25</sup> Notice that the epistemic probability an asserter assigns to the possibility of being later justified to judge as inaccurate her current assertion that it might be that *p*, need not correspond to the epistemic probability he assigns to the untruth of the proposition that *p*. One may consider that there is probably no life in outer space but assertively utter “There might be life in outer space,” because one thinks there is a small chance that there is life in outer space. However, one can be, at the same time, pretty certain that one will never be in a position to judge this assertion as inaccurate.

context of assessment occupied by *Ignorant* at the time of acting. Dietz invites us to think about the opposite type of case (*ignorant assessor cases*), namely a case where *Ignorant* assesses an apodeictic epistemic modal claim made by *Knower*, or at least by someone who –for all we know– may have the relevant knowledge. We can distinguish two kinds of *ignorant assessor case* that have been presented in the literature: cases that involve an apodeictic epistemic modal claim that *Ignorant* comes to know that has been actually made, and cases that do not.

As an illustration of the first type of case, suppose that in the following dialogue Lucy knows where Granger is and Myles does not (just like in the original case), and “possible” is used to express the same as “might” under an epistemic reading.

Lucy: It is not possible that Professor Granger is in Prague.

Myles: You are wrong. Professor Granger might be in Prague. She was planning to travel there, and I do not know whether she ended up there or whether she changed her plans at the last minute.

As Dietz shows, in this case we are not at all inclined to judge that Myles can, from his context, correctly assess Lucy’s sincere assertion as inaccurate and so accurately make the just stated spoken intervention.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, it strikes us as odd to consider that Lucy’s assertion is inaccurate as assessed from Myles’s context. But if truth relativism holds that the relevant information state at a context of assessment is the knowledge of the assessor (following MacFarlane (2011d; 2014, 254-255), we call this natural version of the view “solipsistic relativism”), the proposal yields the result that Lucy’s assertion is inaccurate as assessed from Myles’s context, as long as Myles’s knowledge leaves open the possibility of Granger being in Prague. More generally, the view entails that a sincere apodeictic epistemic modal assertion made by a well-informed speaker (*Knower*) is inaccurate relative to the context of assessment of an ill-informed subject (*Ignorant*), and this seems wrong. Arguably, if *Ignorant* takes notice of *Knower*’s assertion she should either (i) refrain from assessing this assertion as accurate or inaccurate in case she doubts whether *Knower* has knowledge that rules out the possibility under consideration (in the just presented

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<sup>26</sup> It is worth pointing out that Dietz (2008) does not use the term “accuracy,” but talks of truth and correctness as applied to utterances or statements. Be that as it may, his critical remarks involving these categories can be cashed out in terms of the notion of accuracy as applied to assertions.

example, Granger being in Prague) or whether *Knower* is being sincere, or (ii) assess it as accurate in case she realizes that *Knower* has this knowledge and is being sincere. If she does something else instead, she would presumably make an *absolute* mistake (even if she is epistemically fault-free). And this makes counterintuitive the idea that *Knower*'s assertion is inaccurate as assessed from *Ignorant*'s context.

An immediate response a relativist can give to this first type of case is that if *Ignorant* trusts *Knower* and is rational, she will change her context of assessment by enriching her knowledge after taking notice of *Knower*'s assertion. As a result, she will not reject this assertion: from her new context, *Ignorant* will assess this assertion as accurate. It is clear that this answer cannot deal with all ignorant assessor situations. To begin with, in cases where *Ignorant* –for whatever reason- doubts whether *Knower* has the relevant knowledge (i.e. knows that the relevant possibility does not hold) or whether she is being sincere, and so does not acquire this knowledge after taking notice of *Knower*'s assertion, solipsistic relativism still predicts that *Ignorant* can, from her context, correctly assess *Knower*'s assertion as inaccurate. And this, as we saw, strikes us as wrong, insofar as *Ignorant* arguably has to suspend judgment as to how this assertion is to be assessed for accuracy.

Besides, as we pointed out, ignorant assessor cases of the second type do not involve an assertion that *Ignorant* knows that has been made and so can take into account to improve her knowledge. Dietz (2008, 251-252) asks us to think about an individual assessing on Monday, when she does not know whether there is any counterexample to Goldbach's conjecture, a possible sincere assertive utterance of "There cannot be any counterexample to Goldbach's conjecture" made by her on Tuesday in a possibly better epistemic position. According to solipsistic relativism, as assessed from the context the subject occupies on Monday, her possible future assertion is inaccurate.<sup>27</sup> But this, it seems, can be wrong, insofar as the subject may have the relevant knowledge on Tuesday. In turn, MacFarlane (2011d, 174-175; 2014, 260-261) considers a case where he proved Theorem X yesterday but today does not remember whether he proved it, refute it or did neither. According to solipsistic relativism, an assertive utterance of "Theorem X must be true" that MacFarlane might have made yesterday, is inaccurate as assessed from his current

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<sup>27</sup> Put differently, for solipsistic relativism, the subject can, relatively to the context of assessment she occupies on Monday, say truly "If I sincerely assert tomorrow that there cannot be any counterexample to Goldbach's conjecture, I will be mistaken (my assertion will be inaccurate)."

context, since the knowledge he has at this context leaves open whether the theorem is true or false.<sup>28</sup> But this seems wrong, insofar as yesterday he actually had the relevant knowledge.

To be sure, the relativist can try to accommodate all the problematic cases we have just seen by claiming that the information state (set of open possibilities) that – as a value for a parameter in the circumstances and indices- is determined by a context of assessment need not be the assessor’s knowledge, and so that the solipsistic version of truth relativism should be abandoned. In these problematic cases, *Ignorant*’s actual consideration of an (at least, for all the assessor knows, possible) assertion would change her context by changing the relevant information state but not by changing her knowledge. The relativist can say, for instance, that in these cases the set of possibilities determined by *Ignorant*’s new context of assessment is a composite of the set representing the asserter’s knowledge and the one representing *Ignorant*’s knowledge, and since *Ignorant* does not know if the relevant possibility is included in this set, she must suspend judgment as to whether the assertion is accurate or inaccurate. However, the assertion would be –as long as there is a fact of the matter about which knowledge the asserter has at the time of the assertion- either accurate or inaccurate as assessed from *Ignorant*’s context. And in case the asserter had the relevant knowledge and made her assertion sincerely, her assertion would be accurate as assessed from this context.

Be that as it may, I believe that the two replies we considered miss the ultimate point of Dietz’s objection. The objection is ultimately based on the apparent impossibility of a sincere apodeictic epistemic modal assertion made by a well-informed individual being inaccurate relative to *Ignorant*’s initial context of assessment. In other words, it is based on the oddness of considering that, relative to the defective information state operative in *Ignorant*’s initial context of assessment, such an assertion is actually inaccurate. According to this, our remarks on how *Ignorant* should evaluate a sincere apodeictic epistemic modal assertion made by someone who is or –for all we know- might be well informed are a means to make evident the oddness of this result yielded by truth relativism. If it is not possible, under any circumstance, for an ill-informed assessor to *correctly* (from her context

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<sup>28</sup> In other words, for solipsistic relativism, MacFarlane can, relatively to the context of assessment he occupies today, say truly “If I sincerely asserted yesterday that Theorem X must be true, I was mistaken (my assertion was inaccurate).”

but in a non-epistemic sense of “correct”) judge that a sincere apodeictic epistemic modal assertion made by a well-informed speaker is inaccurate, the thesis that this assertion is inaccurate relative to the context of assessment the former subject occupies as long as she does not actually judge such an assertion, becomes dubious. After all, relativists support their view by appealing to intuitions about when speakers are perfectly entitled to make, reject or retract certain assertions, and accordingly about when they are perfectly entitled to judge such assertions as accurate or inaccurate. Thus, claiming that *Ignorant*’s context can change in a relevant way as a result of an evaluation she actually makes, does not ultimately constitute a satisfactory answer.<sup>29</sup>

Relativists have given two replies to Dietz’s criticism. On the one hand, MacFarlane (2011d, 175-177; 2014, 260-261) has offered an answer that is quite similar to our second hypothetical reply. On the other hand, MacFarlane (2011d, 175) and Egan and Weatherson (2011, 13) have suggested the adoption of a hybrid contextualist/relativist view that is meant to accommodate the problematic cases without appealing to the claim that the ill-informed assessor changes her context as a result of considering an assertion. Let us see these replies in some detail.

MacFarlane (2011d, 175-177; 2014, 260-261) argues that the context of assessment determines an information state in a flexible way that allows the speaker’s knowledge (in cases where the assessor is not the speaker) to be relevant in this context. According to this version of the relativist proposal, which MacFarlane calls “flexible relativism,” despite the information had by the speaker being in some cases relevant for assessing an epistemic modal assertion, it is the context of the assessor the one that determines when this information (or any other) is relevant. MacFarlane distinguishes two pragmatic criteria that would be used to discriminate between contexts of assessment where the speaker’s knowledge is relevant and those where it is not:

In contexts where the primary point of the assessment is critical evaluation of a speaker’s assertion (as when one is trying to determine whether the speaker

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<sup>29</sup> At this point, it is worth stressing that the relativist not only intends to predict speakers’ behaviour, but also to explain it by means of a theory that accounts for the assessment sensitivity of our everyday notions of truth and accuracy, which would be responsible for our disagreement and retraction intuitions. And the oddness of the just mentioned result yielded by truth relativism about epistemic modals, casts doubt over the thesis that these everyday notions are information state-assessment sensitive.

might be a trustworthy source of information), the relevant information state will generally be a composite of the speaker's and the assessor's information. And in contexts where the assessor is simply trying to guide her own inquiry, the relevant information state may be entirely determined by her own knowledge. But in each case, it is features of the context of assessment that determine which information is relevant. (2011d, 176-177)

Flexible relativism would generally agree with solipsistic relativism on whether an assertion is accurate or inaccurate relative to a context of assessment in all cases where the assessor does not ignore any of the relevant facts known by the speaker. And in cases where the speaker's knowledge is relevant at the context of the assessor, flexible relativism would yield results that are in line with our intuitions.

This response is subject to the same main critical observation as our hypothetical replies were subject to: our objection is ultimately based on the apparent impossibility of a sincere apodeictic epistemic modal assertion made by a well-informed subject being inaccurate relative to the context of assessment occupied by an ill-informed subject, no matter whether this latter individual actually considers this assertion or not. In addition, this reply leaves open the possibility of cases where *Ignorant* can correctly (from her context but in a non-epistemic sense of "correct") judge as inaccurate a sincere apodeictic epistemic modal assertion made by *Knower*. To be sure, *Ignorant* may well be *warranted* in judging the apodeictic epistemic modal proposition asserted by *Knower* as false and the assertion itself as inaccurate. But it seems wrong, even if *Ignorant* is simply trying to guide her own inquiry, to hold that *Knower*'s assertion is actually inaccurate as assessed from *Ignorant*'s context, and so that *Ignorant* can correctly (from her context but in a non-epistemic sense of "correct") evaluate this assertion as inaccurate.

MacFarlane (2011d, 175) and Egan and Weatherson (2011, 13) suggest a second alternative reply to Dietz's objection that does not consist in claiming that *Ignorant*'s context changes as a result of her consideration of an assertion. They propose to complicate the post-semantics by taking the information relevant for evaluating an epistemic modal assertion to be fixed partially by the context of use and partially by the context of assessment. This information would always be a combination of the information known by the agent of the context of use (the speaker's knowledge) and the information known by the agent of the context of assessment (the assessor's

knowledge). There are different ways of conceiving of this combination. The weakest one and the one proposed by these authors is to take the open possibilities to be those not excluded either by the knowledge of the speaker or by the knowledge of the assessor.<sup>30</sup> On MacFarlane's proposal, this is achieved by taking the value of the information state parameter to be fixed partially by the context of use and partially by the context of assessment: this value would be the set of worlds excluded neither by the speaker's knowledge nor by the assessor's knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Such a hybrid contextualist/relativist proposal agrees with solipsistic relativism on whether an assertion is accurate or inaccurate relative to a context of assessment in all cases where the assessor does not ignore any of the relevant facts known by the speaker, which are the cases used to motivate truth relativism. But on the other hand, the proposal holds, unlike solipsistic relativism, that a sincere apodeictic epistemic modal assertion made by *Knower* is accurate as assessed from *Ignorant's* context.

This alternative does not do better than flexible relativism, since it yields significant undesirable results. As Dietz (2008, 253-254) shows, once we try to accommodate the ignorant assessor cases by taking the relevant information state to be fixed partially by the context of use and partially by the context of assessment, we should say that in a case like the one from *Puzzle 2*, the apodeictic epistemic modal assertion *Knower* makes (e.g. Lucy's assertive utterance of "Professor Granger cannot be in Prague") and the non-apodeictic epistemic modal assertion *Ignorant* previously makes (e.g. Myles's assertive utterance of "Professor Granger might be in Prague") are both accurate from *Ignorant's* initial context of assessment.<sup>32</sup> But these assertions are supposed to be in disagreement with each other, and so they should not be seen as being both accurate relative to a single context of assessment (i.e. for one single assessor). Recall that the relativist supports her view by appealing to our disagreement and retraction intuitions stemming from cases like the one from *Puzzle*

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<sup>30</sup> Kai von Fintel and Anthony S. Gilles (2011, 109-114), in turn, propose a distributive way of combining the knowledge of two individuals in a contextualist framework. According to them, the set of worlds compatible with what is known distributively by *a* and *b* is the set of worlds that are not excluded by what would be known by a perfectly rational subject who knew everything known by *a* and *b*. This is a stronger way of combining the knowledge of two individuals that a relativist could also use to combine the knowledge of the speaker and the knowledge of the assessor.

<sup>31</sup> To be sure, according to this proposal, the information state that in a context of assessment is relevant for evaluating an assertion is a composite of the assessor's and the speaker's knowledge. But the relevance of this information state is not explained exclusively in terms of features of the context of assessment, since this context is seen as only partially determining this information state.

<sup>32</sup> Note that with respect to *Ignorant's* assertion, the context of use coincides with *Ignorant's* initial context of assessment.

2.

To conclude our comments on our objection from ignorant assessors, it is worth noting that this line of criticism can be applied to a relativist treatment of most, if not all, regular non-apodeictic epistemic modal assertions. As we saw, ignorant assessor cases of the second type involve an apodeictic epistemic modal assertion that *Ignorant* and perhaps even ourselves as readers ignore either if it has occurred, if it is occurring, or if it will occur. Now, assuming any variant of truth relativism about epistemic modals, there surely is, for most pairs of propositions that *it might be that p* and that *it might be that not-p*<sup>33</sup> that are true as assessed from a context *c*, a possible<sup>34</sup> sincere assertion of the negation of one of these propositions made by someone who, at the time of the assertion, knows or –for all we know- might know whether *p* is true. And it seems that we are in no position to claim that an assessor can, from context *c*, correctly judge this assertion as inaccurate. This shows that for most, if not all, regular non-apodeictic epistemic modal assertions, we can find apodeictic epistemic modal assertions that allow us to design *ignorant assessor cases* to cast doubt on truth relativism about epistemic modals.

As we saw in chapter 4, we could answer the linking problem and make sense of truth as assessment sensitive if we made sense of the notion of *rightness* as applied to contexts of assessment. The objection leveled in this section shows that there is no sense to be made of this notion in the case of relativism about epistemic modals.

According to what we said in this section, there would be, for most ordinary propositions that *it might be that p* and that *it might be that not-p* that are true as assessed from one's context, a context of assessment whose agent knows or –for all one knows- might know whether the possibility under consideration holds. And it is wrong for one to take this agent as mistaken in judging one of these propositions as false. But, if this is so, one cannot take the context one occupies and from which one makes non-apodeictic epistemic modal claims as a *right* context of assessment, i.e. as being a context where the *right* information state is in play. In other words, one cannot privilege one's own context of assessment over others where different information states operate in a way that allows one to correctly (from one's context) assess as inaccurate any assertion made in accordance with such information states.

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<sup>33</sup> For the sake of simplicity, we assume that proposition *p* is use sensitive only with respect to the world, and assessment sensitive only with respect to the information state.

<sup>34</sup> As I am using the word “possible” here, an assertion is possible insofar as its occurrence is compatible with all we know.

To be sure, the relativist can claim that one's context may still be better than others, in the sense that one is in a better epistemic position than the agents of these other contexts are. This would be the reason why –the argument goes- one can reject a non-apodeictic epistemic modal claim made by someone who ignores something one knows. But the possibility of better epistemic positions prevents us from making sense of information state-assessment sensitive truth and accuracy. Therefore, we conclude, there is no way out of the linking problem in the case of epistemic modals.

### 7.5. Non-indexical contextualism and *Puzzle 2*

As we explained in the third section, non-indexical contextualism is supposed to adequately face *Puzzle 1* but not *Puzzle 2*. And, it can be claimed, despite the problem that truth relativism faces, there are still cases like the one from *Puzzle 2* that seem to require a relativist treatment. However, the stated problem in making sense of information state-assessment sensitivity undermines a relativist treatment of epistemic modals. This constitutes reason for reconsidering our description of the above-mentioned cases as involving (a) a strong disagreement of the type classed as preclusion of joint accuracy (i.e. the claims made by the disagreeing parties cannot be jointly accurate) and (b) an act of retracting an assertion as a result of such a disagreement.

As we saw, non-indexical contextualism only accounts for (a') a weaker form of disagreement classed as doxastic non-cotenability (i.e. each party cannot sincerely assert/believe the proposition the other party asserts/believes without changing her mind), and only makes room for (b') correct re-assessments at new contexts of use of previously asserted propositions but not for correct retractions of assertions that are accurate at the contexts where they were made. Can the non-indexical contextualist offer an explanation of the pull *Puzzle 2* (as well as others that are alike) has? I believe she can and also that certain general considerations she can put forward can assuage the worries that such a puzzle may generate. Let us begin with the latter considerations and then close with a tentative explanation of the pull this puzzle has.

As we shall see in the next chapter, there is an important difference between the case of personal taste, aesthetic and moral predicates and all other cases –including the present one- regarding the available evidence for a relativist treatment. In these

latter cases there are no apparent intractable disputes like the ones that motivate truth relativism about moral, aesthetic or personal taste predicates. These are disputes that apparently manifest intractable disagreements (i.e. disagreements that cannot *in principle* be solved by rational means) between the parties to the dispute. The parties to such disputes do not seem to talk past each other but sooner or later reach a deadlock concerning the issue under discussion, and despite of this they keep on willing to judge their disputing parties as wrong. Thus, apparent intractable disputes have identifiable features that *prima facie* support a relativist treatment of a domain of discourse: their apparent intractability at the same time suggests the presence of a disagreement classifiable as preclusion of joint accuracy and the assessment sensitivity of the claims involved.

In the case of epistemic modals, as Egan et al. (2005, 161-162) notice, conversations tend to naturally evolve towards an agreement between the parties on the issue under discussion. It is natural for the party being in a worse epistemic position (*Ignorant*) to trust an apodeictic epistemic modal claim made by another better informed party (*Knower*): unless *Ignorant* had reason to suspect that *Knower* is irresponsibly making her claim, *Knower*'s claim would naturally be evidence for *Ignorant* that *Knower* is in a better epistemic position than she is. And in many cases *Knower* can appeal to other pieces of evidence to support her claim and convince *Ignorant* of its accuracy. Therefore, we cannot adduce the apparent intractability of the disputes involving epistemic modal claims as evidence for truth relativism about epistemic modals.

This does not mean that there cannot be any evidence for truth relativism about epistemic modals. Over and above a mere appeal to our (faultless) disagreement intuitions, the main evidence adduced for thinking that in a case like the one from *Puzzle 2* *Knower* strongly disagrees with *Ignorant* (i.e. the accuracy of *Knower*'s claim precludes the accuracy of *Ignorant*'s claim) is the latter's subsequent retraction evidenced by assertive utterances of sentences such as "I was wrong" or "I was mistaken," and not just by utterances of sentences like "I take that back" or "what I said is false."<sup>35, 36</sup> Be that as it may, this scenario makes the evidence for the

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<sup>35</sup> Whereas "what I said is false" arguably targets the asserted proposition, "I take that back" can be equally seen as targeting the asserted proposition or the assertion itself.

<sup>36</sup> The relativist could also appeal to rejection data constituted by assertive utterances of sentences like "You are wrong" or "You are mistaken." As it happens with the sentences mentioned in the main text, uses of these sentences in conversations involving epistemic modals may not be that common.

proposal non-robust, since uses of the former sentences may not be that common.

Besides, leaving these general issues aside, the non-indexical contextualist could roughly explain the pull of *Puzzle 2* and the apparent asymmetry in our assessments of epistemic modal claims as follows. Saying that *Knower* can correctly assess *Ignorant's* non-apodeictic claim as inaccurate seems plausible mainly because *Knower* is in a better epistemic position than *Ignorant* is, and so *Ignorant* –insofar as she is rational and trusts *Knower*- should re-assess the proposition she asserted after taking into account *Knower's* apodeictic claim. Moreover, we can be misled by the fact that *Knower* can accurately respond to *Ignorant's* claim by uttering “What you said is false” and in many cases (e.g. cases where the truth-value of the proposition of which falsehood is predicated only varies with the world) the accuracy of an utterance of this sentence implies the accuracy of an utterance (made in the same context) of “You are wrong” or “You are mistaken.” In turn, when we consider the opposite case where *Ignorant* assesses an apodeictic claim made by *Knower*, we are not misguided by these factors as to how *Knower's* assertion should be assessed by *Ignorant*, even if we assume that the latter does not know anything about *Knower's* better epistemic position. *Ignorant* is in a worse epistemic position than *Knower*, and so she should either judge *Knower's* assertion as accurate and gain knowledge or at least suspend judgment as to how to assess *Knower's* assertion. Doing something else presumably amounts to making a mistake. As a result, *Ignorant* cannot accurately respond to *Knower's* claim by uttering a sentence like “No, what you said is false.” However, if we are non-indexical contextualists, we should still say that *Ignorant's* first claim was accurate.

To conclude, if we grant the bulk of the reasons adduced in the first section against indexical contextualism, the incapability of truth relativism to answer the linking problem makes non-indexical contextualism about epistemic modals a plausible view.

## 8

**Idiosyncratically Evaluative Predicates**

By an *idiosyncratically evaluative predicate* I understand an evaluative predicate whose content is neutral with respect to some parameter (e.g. a standard of taste parameter) and whose applications are normally resolved in context by an *idiosyncratic* assignment of a value to this parameter (i.e. an assignment based on the affective reactions or values of the agent of the context).<sup>1</sup>

I take certain predicates, like personal (gustatory) taste, aesthetic and moral predicates, to be idiosyncratically evaluative. This is controversial, since it presupposes the truth of either truth relativism or non-indexical contextualism about our use of these predicates (i.e. we are taking them to express contents that are neutral with respect to some special parameter in the circumstances). In this respect, in the first section we present reasons to reject other alternative truth-conditional accounts of these predicates. Be that as it may, as we have pointed out, we are mainly analyzing the distinction between truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism, taking for granted –at least for the sake of argument– some evidence that has been adduced against other more traditional proposals. And, as we pointed out in the introduction, we are not focusing our attention on expressivist views.

We shall find two reasons for thinking that the expressions we class as idiosyncratically evaluative are *prima facie* more suitable for a relativist treatment than others for which such a treatment has been proposed: their idiosyncratically evaluative character at the same time (i) gives rise to apparent intractable disputes that constitute important evidence for truth relativism and (ii) might allow us to make sense of the notion of *right context of assessment* needed to solve the linking problem. However, we shall argue that the prospects of making sense of the *rightness* of a context of assessment based on the idiosyncratically evaluative nature

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<sup>1</sup> This second feature would distinguish these predicates from a verb like “know(s).” As we saw in chapter 6, a standard of knowledge for applying this verb is arguably fixed in context by pragmatic factors like the practical matters at stake, the operant conversational purposes and presuppositions or the epistemic possibilities that have been mentioned or considered.

of a range of predicates are dim, and there are more plausible non-indexical explanations of the apparent intractable disputes. Hence, we shall once again defend a non-indexical contextualist account over a truth relativist one.

Paradigmatic examples of idiosyncratically evaluative predicates would be “tasty,” “disgusting,” “beautiful,” “awful,” “good” and “bad,” just to mention a few. The first two are typically used to respectively express gustatory appraisal and disapproval (the second one can also be used to express other kinds of disapproval), whereas the others are typically used to express either aesthetic or moral approval or disapproval. Among these expressions, we shall focus our attention, like most of the recent literature on truth relativism, on predicates used to convey gustatory approval or disapproval. Following Barry C. Smith (2010; 2012, 257-261), we distinguish such predicates, which he includes in the category of *predicates of personal (gustatory) taste*,<sup>2</sup> from predicates like “salty,” “sweet,” or “minty,” which he classes as *predicates of taste*. Whereas uses of the former ones are always evaluative, the latter ones have purely descriptive uses, i.e. uses by means of which a speaker merely describes the flavour of a thing.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we shall focus our attention on predicates of personal taste and in particular on “tasty.” However, we shall present arguments aimed at showing that the prospects of a truth relativist view on any alleged idiosyncratically evaluative predicate are dim. In other words, we shall use the case of predicates of personal taste, and in particular the case of “tasty,” as a case study for evaluating truth relativism about any idiosyncratically evaluative predicate.

In the first section I present the main reasons adduced against indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism about predicates of personal taste. In the second one I explain how truth relativism is supposed to do better than these views and also outweigh non-indexical contextualism with respect to the purported disagreement and retraction data. In the third section I try to spell out the answer to the linking problem that a relativist about predicates of personal taste can give, and comment on some striking questions that it faces and contemporary relativists have avoided. Finally, in the fourth section I argue for a particular non-indexical contextualist account of these predicates.

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<sup>2</sup> From here on we shall take “taste” to stand for “gustatory taste.”

<sup>3</sup> As Smith (2012, 260-261) points out, recognizing the distinction between these two kinds of predicates does not amount to deny that predicates like “salty” can have evaluative uses alongside its purely descriptive ones. For instance, it is pretty clear that this predicate has a negative evaluative charge in a discourse like the following: “I do not like the stew. It is salty.”

### 8.1. Evaluative invariantism and indexical contextualism

There are two traditional approaches to truth-conditionally account for our use of predicates of personal taste, and the same goes for other predicates we class here as idiosyncratically evaluative:

*Evaluative invariantism:* A predicate of personal taste expresses, across contexts, a single property whose extension does not vary across contexts located at the same world and time.

*Indexical contextualism:* When somebody applies a predicate of personal taste she thereby says that a given object is pleasing or unpleasing according to her or a group that is relevant at her context, or according to her taste or the taste of a group that is relevant at her context.

By far, the most accepted view among philosophers and linguists has been indexical contextualism. Evaluative invariantism faces some problems that make it an unpalatable view for most authors. Relativists (Kölbel 2003, 57-64; 2009, 389-391; Lasersohn 2005, 647-656; MacFarlane 2007, 17-21; 2014, 1-15) argue that indexical contextualism faces equally serious problems, despite not having been as well acknowledged. We start considering evaluative invariantism, and then explain why indexical contextualism would not be a better view.

For evaluative invariantism, a predicate like “tasty” invariantly expresses a property that some things have and others lack independently of the idiosyncratic *taste*<sup>4</sup> that a particular individual or group has at any time, that is, we may say, independently of any particular perspective. Accordingly, this predicate would express a property whose extension (i.e. the set of tasty things) does not vary across contexts located at the same world and time.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that something has the alleged property expressed by a predicate of personal taste independently of the

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<sup>4</sup> Roughly put, we take a taste to be a gustatory standard based on which someone can vaguely classify things (e.g. foods and drinks) in a scale from the least tasty to the most tasty. This does not imply that someone endorsing a standard of taste has an intellectual grasp of a set of classificatory principles. Such a standard or the classificatory principles that constitute it would supervene on the gustatory dispositions and values of a person or group, maybe together with –according to collective contextualist accounts- features of a conversation.

<sup>5</sup> Clearly, in a framework that makes room for world and time-neutral propositions, an evaluative invariantist about “tasty” can claim that something tasty may have a different flavour and so be not tasty at different worlds or times.

features of some creatures, say humans. It is open to an evaluative invariantist to say that, for instance, such a property supervenes on the features (e.g. the actual and potential tastes) of normal human beings in a complex way that makes it independent from the taste of any particular human being or group thereof.

The most significant disadvantage evaluative invariantism has is that it fails to make sense of our practice of using predicates of personal taste. What is our criterion for applying these predicates? Well, *prima facie* it seems that a speaker calls something “tasty” or “not tasty” depending on whether she likes or dislikes its flavour.<sup>6</sup> The following qualifications are in order: (i) the speaker must have first-hand knowledge of the actual flavour of the thing being tasted and (ii) her relevant affective reactions are those she has under appropriate conditions. The first condition is meant to exclude cases where we are misled by our perceptual system. The actual flavour of something, just like the actual color of something, would be a property that the thing in question has, despite supervening on both the physical properties of this thing and our complex sensory system. And in the same way as one is confident of perceiving the actual color of something just when one is seeing it under normal conditions (e.g. one is not under the effect of an hallucinatory drug or the lighting is not abnormal), one is confident of tasting the actual flavour of something just under normal conditions (e.g. in case one’s sensory system is not affected by the previous consumption of a drug). Arguably, under abnormal conditions one would be willing to say that one cannot know the actual color of something or the actual flavour of something. The second condition, in turn, is meant to explain why we can still consider something as tasty despite the fact that that we presently do not find it pleasant because of being, say, completely filled or satiated. The taste conditions would be appropriate just in case factors like the one just mentioned do not operate. Thus, we can take the following principle as the rule speakers follow in applying “tasty”:

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<sup>6</sup> In the last section we shall enrich this simple view on how predicates of personal taste are applied. And we are now and will be then factoring out speakers’ possible tacit appeal to a comparative class (e.g. *tasty for having been cooked by a chef*) when applying “tasty.”

**T:** Apply “tasty”/“not tasty” to something just in case you have first-hand knowledge of its flavour and you like/dislike this flavour under appropriate conditions.<sup>7,8</sup>

Strictly speaking, **T** is not inconsistent with evaluative invariantism: if we all had the same taste and this taste tracked the property of tastiness, then one could take one’s own affective reactions to a food or drink as evidence that it is tasty. But as a matter of fact there are significant differences in the flavours people like and dislike, both cross-culturally and within a single culture. Thus, the evaluative invariantist must explain why we wrongly take **T** as valid for applying “tasty” as she understands it. But there is no satisfactory explanation available to her.

The evaluative invariantist could claim that we all think that our own taste tracks the property expressed by “tasty,” whereas the tastes of many other people do not. In other words, she could attribute a high dose of unreflective chauvinism to speakers. But, as it stands, this explanation is unsatisfactory. Speakers do not chauvinistically use predicates like “red” and “salty,” which (under a descriptive usage) would express more or less contextually invariant properties whose extensions are more or less invariant across contexts located at the same world and time. If we found widespread judgments regarding what is red or salty that contradict our own, we would lose confidence in our ability to competently apply these predicates. As MacFarlane (2014, 5-6) notices, the evaluative invariantist (in his words, the *objectivist*) has to tell us why we are chauvinistic in the case of “tasty” but not in the case of these other predicates. In this regard, she could say that since we are all very

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<sup>7</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 4) introduces a similar rule for the application of “tasty.” The difference between this rule and **T** is that MacFarlane’s rule does not include condition (ii), which I find very plausible despite the difficulty of making it precise. The oddity of the following speeches mentioned by MacFarlane (2014, 4) lends supports to **T** and similar principles:

- I’m not sure whether espresso is tasty, but I hate how it tastes.
- I’ve never been able to stand the taste of durian. Might it be tasty?
- I love orange juice and hate tomato juice. But who knows? Perhaps tomato juice is tastier.

<sup>8</sup> How could a similar principle be formulated in the case of an aesthetic or moral predicate? Well, we should first of all substitute “tasty” in **T** for the predicate in question and “first-hand knowledge of its flavour” for a phrase referring to the knowledge required in order to make the type of judgment under consideration (e.g. first-hand knowledge of how a musical piece sounds or a painting looks like in the case of aesthetic predicates, or knowledge of what an action consists in or how a person behaves in the case of moral predicates). In addition, in the case of moral predicates we should replace “like/dislike” for “approve/disapprove.” In the last section we shall enrich this simple view on how idiosyncratically evaluative predicates are applied.

bad at recognizing the property of tastiness and do not get homogenous feedback correcting our mistakes, we tend to be chauvinistically confident in our own judgments. But this reply, as it stands, is also unsatisfactory. If most of us misapply “tasty,” how is it that this predicate came to express the property the evaluative invariantist claims it expresses? More to the point, how does the content that the evaluative invariantist claims this predicate has relate to our linguistic usage? These questions are hard to answer and aim at the heart of evaluative invariantism. Thus, a view that avoids such questions by accepting the validity of **T** or some similar principle is *prima facie* preferable to evaluative invariantism.<sup>9</sup>

Indexical contextualism about “tasty” is one immediate alternative view that promises to vindicate **T**. On this view, “tasty” can make different contributions to propositional content across contexts. We shall consider two versions of this view. According to the first simpler version, which we class as *solipsistic indexical contextualism*, when a speaker assertively utters a simple sentence containing “tasty,” she is saying about something that is tasty to her or to her current taste. For instance, “Mutton is tasty” would express in context something equivalent to “Mutton is tasty to me/relative to my taste.” Solipsistic indexical contextualism straightforwardly accounts for the validity of **T**, since it takes speakers to be saying something about their likes and dislikes when predicating “tasty” of something: liking something and finding it tasty would be roughly the same thing. However, some problems faced by solipsistic indexical contextualism, which we shall consider below, have led most contextualists to reject it in favor of the approach we class as *collective indexical contextualism*. According to this latter approach, when a speaker assertively utters a simple sentence containing “tasty,” she is saying about something that it is tasty to a contextually relevant group (or relative to the taste of this group), which could only consist of her or could include other people. Let us consider these two versions of indexical contextualism.

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<sup>9</sup> Another problem that an evaluative invariantist is said to have (Kölbel 2009, 393-394; Lasersohn 2005, 665) is that it is hard for her to explain uses of sentences like “Mutton is tasty to John” expressing something not equivalent to what “In John’s opinion, Mutton is tasty” expresses. On an indexical contextualist view it is easy to explain them: if the contents of assertive utterances of sentences like “Mutton is tasty” contain a relativization to an individual or to her taste, it is expectable to find sentences that include a surface expression referring to her. In turn, most relativists treat expressions like “tasty to John” as complex monadic predicates whose extension is the set of things that are tasty relative to John or his taste (taken as a parametric value in our indices and circumstances).

Relativists argue that solipsistic indexical contextualism cannot account for many disagreements and retractions involving predicates of personal taste. When two speakers whose tastes are respectively  $t$  and  $t'$  assertively utter, say, “Mutton is tasty” and “Mutton is not tasty,” they would be asserting compatible propositions about different tastes or individuals. But there is an appearance of disagreement when such sentences are assertively uttered or believed and, accordingly, these sentences can occur in dialogues where disagreement markers are used. For instance, Ann could assert (2) in response of John’s assertion of (1):

- (1) Mutton is tasty
- (2) You are mistaken, mutton is not tasty.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, in the case of personal taste, aesthetic and moral predicates there are, unlike in the other cases we have considered in this dissertation, apparent intractable disputes. These disputes seem to express intractable disagreements and consequently lend support to truth relativism. For instance, we can think about John objecting to Ann’s judgment that a particular wine is tasty by saying things like “Can’t you see that it lacks balance?” In case Ann simply does not find balanced wines tasty, it seems that we have a case of intractable disagreement. It seems wrong, the relativist argues, to accuse Ann of being irrational insofar as she seems entitled to judge the wine the way she does. This means that there are no purely rational means for John to convince her, and the same thing goes for John and his own judgment on the wine. And it further seems that even if they realized this, they could continue arguing with each other for a while and, what is more significant, John could keep on judging Ann as wrong and Ann might do the same with John. To be sure, it can be claimed that this scenario is not as natural as we have suggested: after all, it is common to say that it makes no sense to dispute someone else’s (gustatory) taste. In this respect, the aesthetic and moral disputes may represent clearer cases of apparent intractable

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<sup>10</sup> As Smith (2012, 255-256) points out, an indexical contextualist could claim that a sentence like “Mutton is tasty” has a hidden structure and expresses the same as “[The flavour of] mutton is tasty.” According to this, two people take themselves to disagree when they respectively utter (1) and (2) because they fail to realize that for each of them the same thing has different flavours. After all, we may think, if some food or drink that I like tastes to another person exactly as it tastes to me, how can she dislike it? As Smith (2012, 256) points out, this answer fails to distinguish flavours from liking or disliking them. And there is scientific evidence showing that these experiences are processed in separate areas of the brain so that we can keep on identifying a flavour despite a change in our responses to it.

disagreements.<sup>11</sup> We arguably tend to see individuals who accept radically different moral and aesthetic principles from our own as wrong. It seems natural to judge someone who sees as morally acceptable an action we consider as a crime as being wrong, and it seems (maybe not as) natural to judge someone who sees as aesthetically worthy a piece of music we consider that is poorly written as being wrong. But at the same time, there seems to be little to say to rationally change the just-mentioned opinions, insofar as they are the result of endorsing a moral or aesthetic standard different from our own.

Solipsistic indexical contextualism is also accused (MacFarlane 2014, 13-15) of not accounting for our retractions of personal taste claims. It is argued that when we cease to find something tasty, we tend to retract our earlier assertions that the thing in question was tasty. For example, if I liked candies when I was a child and after growing up and being exposed to a wide variety of flavours I came to find candies cloying and disgusting, I arguably judge my earlier assertions that candies were tasty as inaccurate and so tend to retract them. I would not, the argument goes, say that candies used to be tasty but they are not tasty any longer, since this implies that the candies' flavour changed and this is compatible with the accuracy of my earlier assertions. Solipsistic indexical contextualism cannot see ourselves as entitled to make such retractions, since it takes the propositions asserted by uttering "Candies are tasty" and "Candies are not tasty," respectively asserted before and after the change in my taste, as being about different tastes (or about the same taster taken at different times). Arguably, as it happens with disagreement appearances, retraction intuitions are stronger in the case of aesthetic, moral and personal taste predicates than in the other cases we have considered in this dissertation. After all, a retraction can be seen as a manifestation of a particular type of disagreement, namely a disagreement with one's previous self or, if you prefer, with one's previous opinions and claims.

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<sup>11</sup> I actually do not think that there is a deep contrast between (gustatory) taste and aesthetic matters. After all, there is a more or less well established tradition of food and wine critics. In this respect, there could be an asymmetry between John and Ann in the example presented above: John could be seen as knowing more about wine than Ann, and so it could be thought that Ann should take back her claim after John's rejection. I chose this example for the sake of simplicity and because it is an example that most relativists see as supporting their view. But it is worth pointing out that we can devise examples of apparent intractable disagreement without any asymmetry. Smith (2010) does just that when he analyzes an apparent intractable dispute actually had by two wine critics.

The relativist claims that solipsistic indexical contextualists must hold that our disagreement and retraction judgments are mistaken, and so attribute systematic error to speakers. This would make their proposal lose its alleged advantages over evaluative invariantism. In taking compatible claims to be incompatible, speakers would be guilty of semantic error: they would, for instance, take the sentences “Mutton is tasty” and “Mutton is not tasty” as expressing contradictory propositions in relevantly different (i.e. with respect to the operative taste standard) contexts, when in fact they do not. As a matter of fact, the solipsistic indexical contextualist may have to say that speakers mistakenly accept evaluative invariantism, insofar as their disagreement and retraction judgments would suggest that they take the extension of “tasty” as not varying across contexts located at the same world and time. And if the solipsistic indexical contextualist did say this, she would have to attribute chauvinism to speakers in addition to semantic error, given that speakers would be seen as unreflectively taking their own personal taste to track the invariant property that “tasty” is wrongly assumed to express. As we have pointed out before, insofar as indexical contextualism is motivated by its promise to account for speakers’ judgments on how propositions and claims are to be assessed, attributing systematic error to speakers tends to undermine the positive evidence adduced in its favor and against alternative views.

Collective indexical contextualism promises to solve some of the above-mentioned flaws that relativists claim solipsistic indexical contextualism has. Insofar as this view takes members of a conversation to share (at least for the purpose of having the conversation) a standard of taste, it vindicates the intra-conversational disagreement appearances: in assertively uttering “Mutton is tasty” and “Mutton is not tasty,” two members of a conversation would respectively assert contradictory propositions about a single taste standard or about a single group of people taken at a given time.

Be that as it may, relativists argue, this proposal cannot vindicate all of our disagreement judgments and it simply does not account for the alleged retraction data. It does not vindicate all disagreement appearances because, analogously to what happens in other cases we have seen, there are apparent inter-conversational disagreements and –relatedly– eavesdropper cases. We would not need to have an actual dispute and so to be member of a single conversational group in order to disagree. I could disagree, for instance, with distant people that I never met about

what is tasty or about what is morally or aesthetically good. Accordingly, eavesdroppers randomly hearing a personal taste claim could disagree with the speaker. As a matter of fact, anyone having notice of a personal taste claim, no matter where she is or when she considers the claim, could disagree with it. If we tried to extend the notion of contextually relevant group to include all these people, our notion of contextual relevance would lose all explanatory power. Therefore, collective indexical contextualism would not solve the problem solipsistic indexical contextualism is said to have to explain a range of apparent disagreements. In addition, collective indexical contextualism, like any other form of contextualism, does not predict that once a change in one's taste on a particular food or drink has occurred one should retract earlier assertions that the food or drink in question was tasty or not tasty. On any contextualist view, assertion accuracy is absolute insofar as the context of use fixes all parametric values for truth and accuracy assessments.

In addition, as MacFarlane (2014, 12-13) shows, collective indexical contextualism has trouble to vindicate a principle like **T**. On a collective indexical contextualist view that holds that in applying "tasty" someone thereby says that all, most or some of the members of the conversational group like/dislike the thing that is said to be tasty/not tasty, **T** is simply invalid. Speakers would wrongly take their own taste as the only one relevant for making a personal taste claim, where in fact they should consider the taste of each member of the contextually relevant group. And as we just saw, positing this kind of systematic error, which involves semantic error and chauvinism, tends to undermine the positive case for indexical contextualism. Alternatively, a collective indexical contextualist can claim that a speaker makes a personal taste claim based on her own affective reactions as an attempt to, via accommodation and negotiation, fix a taste standard for the conversational group that is as similar as possible to her own personal standard. In some cases the reason why a speaker would do this could be said to be purely practical, e.g. to cause the group to buy some particular food for dinner. But it does not seem that we can reasonably attribute such a practical purpose to speakers in all cases that create trouble to the indexical contextualist. For many such cases, thus, this last proposal owes an explanation of why speakers make personal taste claims.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> There is another possible objection to this proposal. David Lewis (1979) introduced the notion of accommodation with respect to gradable adjectives like "flat" and "tall." It is easy to think of a standard of flatness or tallness as a cut off point in a (roughly) linear scale and see accommodation

Finally, as it happens in other cases we have considered, it can be argued (Kölbel 2009, 391-393) that indexical contextualism about predicates of personal taste –or about any of the other predicates we class as idiosyncratically evaluative– does not square well with our reporting practice and our inter-contextual truth assessments. When we report someone else’s personal taste claim we can use the same predicate of personal taste as the speaker used without making any allusion to her (possibly different) taste standard. If John utters “Mutton is tasty,” we take ourselves to be entitled to assertively utter “John said that Mutton is tasty,” no matter whether the context where John made his utterance is relevantly different from the context where the report takes place (i.e. no matter whether different taste standards are in play in these contexts).<sup>13</sup> And we judge that what someone said by uttering “Mutton is tasty” is true just in case this sentence is true at our context, regardless of the truth-value assessment it deserves at the context of the speaker.

To sum up this section, the relativist argues that evaluative invariantism and collective indexical contextualism have trouble to vindicate **T**, whereas indexical contextualism of any sort cannot account for many appearances of disagreement and retraction. Moreover, all these views have to attribute an objectionable kind and amount of error.

## 8.2. Truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism

Truth relativism about “tasty” is said to vindicate **T** and the disagreement and retraction judgments presented in the last section. Non-indexical contextualism about “tasty,” in turn, could vindicate **T** but not these judgments. And both views can certainly account for our reporting practice and inter-contextual truth assessments, since they both assign a contextually invariant content to “tasty.” Similar comments

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and negotiation as fixing this point. On the other hand, it seems that we cannot understand a taste, moral or aesthetic standard in such a way and, consequently, it is not clear how these pragmatic processes would work to fix such a standard.

<sup>13</sup> It can be argued that once we mention the subject of the attribution, this individual becomes contextually salient and so it is her standard of taste the one that is being talked about in the report (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009, 40-42). This line of answer does not square well with solipsistic indexical contextualism, which takes “tasty” to automatically allude to the speaker or her standard of taste. The model for such a treatment of “tasty” is the way an indexical like “I” refers, and this expression does not pragmatically shift its reference when embedded. This answer squares much better with collective indexical contextualism.

can be made about any idiosyncratically evaluative predicate. Let us present what we take to be the best truth relativist view on predicates of personal taste and then see how it is supposed to overcome the flaws had by the alternative proposals.

There are a few ways in which one can conceive of a truth relativist view on predicates of personal taste. Following Kölbel (2008, 16-20; 2009, 383-384) and MacFarlane (2014, 149-152), one can consider that a simple personal taste sentence (i.e. a simple sentence containing a predicate of personal taste) in context, as well as the proposition it expresses, has a truth-value relative to a standard of taste included in the indices or circumstances of evaluation. There is reason to formulate truth relativism about predicates of personal taste using a taste (moral or aesthetic) standard parameter instead of other kinds of parameters that figure in the literature. Among the most prominent alternative accounts, Richard (2008, 136-145) has proposed to include a *perspective* parameter whereas Lasersohn (2005) and Stephenson (2007) have included a *judge* parameter.

There are two specific reasons MacFarlane (2014, 149, 163-165) gives for including a standard of taste parameter instead of a judge parameter. The first of these reasons can also be used to favor the inclusion of a taste parameter instead of a perspective parameter. To begin with, including a judge or perspective parameter prevents us from taking different expressions (e.g. “tasty” and “might”) to be judge or perspective dependent in different ways, namely in an assessment sensitive or use sensitive way. More precisely, if in giving a relativist account of “tasty” we take the relevant judge or perspective to be fixed by the context of assessment, we automatically make all possible judge or perspective dependent expressions assessment sensitive. We avoid this problem if we include taste standards in our indices and circumstances: standards of taste have an impact only on our truth assessments of personal taste sentences and propositions.

Secondly, given that a judge can change her taste over time, Lasersohn and Stephenson’s approach yields predictions that should be deemed wrong by a genuine truth relativist. On these authors’ views, we actually need a judge and a time to locate the judge at in order to assign a truth-value to a personal taste proposition or sentence. Lasersohn and Stephenson already have a time in their indices and circumstances of evaluation. But, as we shall see below, if we consider the time of the indices and circumstance that we use to make our assessments as the relevant

time to locate the judge at, we yield results that contradict the purported retraction data.<sup>14</sup>

The point is ultimately independent of whether we treat temporal modifiers (e.g. “now”, “yesterday,” “tomorrow,” etc.) as sentential operators or not. For simplicity’s sake we choose, following MacFarlane (2014, 163-165), to explain this point only in terms of an operational treatment of these expressions. Suppose that my taste has changed: 25 years ago I liked candies and I do not like them now. Assuming a principle analogous to **T** and taking the time of the relevant indices and circumstance as the time to locate the judge at, on Lasersohn and Stephenson views something is tasty at a circumstance if the judge of this circumstance likes that thing at the time of this circumstance. As a consequence, according to these views (3) is true for me and (4) is false for me:

(3) 25 years ago, candies were tasty.

(4) 25 years ago, candies were not tasty.

The sentential operator “25 years ago” shifts the time of the indices and circumstance from the present to 25 years ago, and so the embedded sentences in (3) and (4) should be assessed at this latter time. Since I liked candies 25 years ago, (3) turns out to be true and (4) false. Thus, my assertive utterances of “Candies are tasty” made 25 years ago were assertions of something that was true for me, and so I should judge these assertions as accurate and not retract them today, despite the change in my taste. This result, then, contravenes the alleged retraction data adduced by relativists in support of their view.<sup>15</sup>

We could, to be sure, include another time in the indices and circumstances just to locate the judge at, but this would complicate the semantics in an unnecessary way. It is better to avoid this problem by including, instead of a judge, a standard of taste in our indices and circumstances. Once this is done, there is no reason to treat

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<sup>14</sup> It is important for the relativist to vindicate such data alongside the alleged disagreement data supporting her view. After all –as we have pointed out– retraction is a manifestation of a special kind of disagreement, namely a disagreement with one’s previous self, assertions or beliefs.

<sup>15</sup> There are other drawbacks this alternative has. As Lasersohn (2005, 663) realizes, it gives arguably wrong results like taking “In 2500 years, mutton will be tasty” as entailing “Someone will be alive in 2500 years.” Another unpalatable result pointed out by MacFarlane (2014, 164) is that speeches like the following would be fine: “Mutton was tasty last year but now it is not. Its flavour has not changed though, it is just that I have gotten tired of it.”

the standard of taste and time parameters in our indices and circumstances as non-independent: shifting the time has no effect on the value of the standard of taste parameter. Accordingly, I should assess (3) and (4) using my present standard of taste, which yields the result that (3) is false and (4) true. And, according to a relativist view, this is as it should be. It is worth pointing out that this argument can be run concerning any other case where a relativist proposal including a judge parameter in the indices and circumstances is contrasted with another relativist proposal that uses other type of parameter.<sup>16, 17</sup>

Let us now characterize truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism using our preferred semantic framework, and explain why both views could vindicate **T** but only truth relativism could account for the disagreement and retraction data. As in the other cases we have considered, we distinguish –following MacFarlane– between the semantics and the post-semantics. Whereas the semantics yields recursive definitions of sentential truth at a context and index and propositional truth at a circumstance of evaluation, the post-semantics offers definitions of sentential and propositional truth at a context. As we explained, the latter definitions are the ones that discriminate between truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism. According to the semantics endorsed by these two views, a predicate of personal taste has a contextually invariant content that is taste standard-neutral, and so this content has an extension relative to a standard of taste. Accordingly, both these views can easily vindicate our reporting practice and inter-contextual truth assessments involving predicates of personal taste. However, these views differ in defining truth at a context in different ways. Whereas non-indexical contextualism takes the context of use as fixing the standard of taste, truth relativism takes the context of assessment as doing this (and, of course, assumes that these contexts can

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<sup>16</sup> In particular, as we suggested in chapters 2 and 7, this argument can be used to favor MacFarlane’s view on epistemic modals over the views advocated by Egan and Stephenson.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth pointing out that we can construct a similar argument to favor a relativist view that does not introduce a judge parameter by appealing to counterfactual sentences (i.e. sentences that shift the world of evaluation) and our alleged disagreement intuitions. Recall the argument from chapter 4 against the first relativist intra-contextual linking explanation. In that chapter we argued that the relativist needs to shift the world independently from the parametric value fixed by the context of assessment in order to evaluate certain counterfactuals in a way that coheres with her purpose of vindicating a range of disagreements.

differ). Using the same nomenclature as the one we used in previous chapters, these views' post-semantic definitions run as follows:<sup>18</sup>

*Non-indexical contextualist sentential truth:* a sentence  $S$  is true as used at context  $c$  iff for all assignments  $a$ ,  $[[S]]^c \langle w_c, t_c, st_c, a \rangle = \text{True}$ , where  $w_c$  is the world  $c$ ,  $t_c$  is the time of  $c$ , and  $st_c$  is the standard of taste relevant at  $c$  (e.g. the taste standard of the agent of  $c$ ).

*Non-indexical contextualist propositional truth:* a proposition  $|S|^c$  is true as used at context  $c$  iff it is true at  $\langle w_c, t_c, st_c \rangle$ .

*Truth relativist sentential truth:* a sentence  $S$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from context  $c_2$  iff for all assignments  $a$ ,  $[[S]]^{c_1} \langle w_{c_1}, t_{c_1}, st_{c_2}, a \rangle = \text{True}$ , where  $w_{c_1}$  is the world of  $c_1$ ,  $t_{c_1}$  is the time of  $c_1$ , and  $st_{c_2}$  is the standard of taste relevant at  $c_2$  (typically, the taste standard of the agent of  $c_2$ ).

*Truth relativist propositional truth:* a proposition  $|S|^{c_1}$  is true as used at context  $c_1$  and assessed from context  $c_2$  iff it is true at  $\langle w_{c_1}, t_{c_1}, st_{c_2} \rangle$ .

Truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism can vindicate **T**: both views can claim that, relative to her own context, an individual correctly applies “tasty”/“not tasty” to a food or drink just in case she has first-hand knowledge of its flavour and she likes/dislikes this flavour under appropriate conditions. But only truth relativism would be in a position to vindicate the appearances of disagreement and retraction presented in the last section. On a relativist view, each disagreeing party can correctly, from her own context of assessment, judge that the other party is wrong in asserting a personal taste proposition that is inconsistent with the one she sincerely asserts; from every context of assessment, the accuracy of one party's assertion precludes the accuracy of the other party's assertion. As we have explained, truth relativism would be able to see such cases of apparent disagreement as actually involving preclusion of joint accuracy. Non-indexical contextualism, in turn, could only take such cases as involving the weak, arguably non-genuine form of disagreement classed as doxastic non-cotenability.

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<sup>18</sup> Following MacFarlane (2014, 151-152), we contemplate the existence of time-neutral propositions and so include a time in the circumstances of evaluation. Nothing specifically relevant to the case of idiosyncratically evaluative predicates hinges on this decision.

With respect to the retraction data, truth relativism holds that, for instance, my assertive utterance of “Candies are tasty” made 25 years ago at context  $c_1$ , when my taste was such that I liked candies, should be retracted as inaccurate if challenged at my present context  $c_2$ , given that according to my current taste candies are not tasty. If the taste of candies had changed over the last 25 years but my taste had remained constant, it would have been incorrect for me to retract my claim, since those candies I tasted 25 years ago would have been tasty after all and so my past claim would have been accurate. According to the relativist, whereas the object being judged is fixed by the context of use and is part of what the claim is about (i.e. it is part of the asserted content), the relevant taste standard is fixed by the context of assessment and it is not something the claim is about. Non-indexical contextualism, it is said, cannot account for the retraction data insofar as it takes accuracy to be absolute.

In the last section we shall put part of these disagreement and retraction data into question and argue that the error the non-indexical contextualist has to attribute is, unlike the one indexical contextualists and relativists have to ascribe, acceptable.

### 8.3. A possible answer to the linking problem

There are apparent intractable disputes and disagreements in the case of personal taste, moral and aesthetic predicates that confer special *prima facie* support on a truth relativist account of these expressions. As we shall see, we can try to explain the existence of such apparent disputes and disagreements and so make sense of truth relativism by appealing to the idiosyncratically evaluative nature of these predicates. More to the point, these predicates’ feature may allow us to provide an answer to the linking problem. In order to spell out how this feature could be so used it proves useful to compare a predicate like “tasty” with an arguably non-idiosyncratically evaluative expression like “know(s).”<sup>19</sup> As I argued in chapter 6, there is reason not to give a truth relativist account of “know(s).” We shall appeal to some considerations put forward in that chapter to compare these two expressions and make a *prima facie* case for a relativist view on “tasty” based on its idiosyncratically

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<sup>19</sup> It is worth pointing out that I do not contend that “know(s)” is not an evaluative expression, but just that it is not an idiosyncratically evaluative one.

evaluative nature. Nevertheless, we shall ultimately argue for the rejection of this view and defend a non-indexical contextualist approach.

As we explained in chapter 6, in the case of knowledge ascriptions we face the following problem to make sense of the notion of *right context of assessment* in order to provide an explanation of the relativist non-monadic truth notion in terms of the ordinary monadic one. *Rational Belief and Assertion*<sup>20</sup>, a plausible rationality principle governing belief and assertion, together with truth relativism implies that speakers are either irrational (i.e. they commit error) in making sincere knowledge claims or at least very forgetful about how knowledge claims are assessed at different contexts (which just amounts to impute ignorance to them). One cannot coherently take one's own context as a right context of assessment if one is certain that one will later occupy another context where a different knowledge standard operates and from which one's previous context will not be a right one. But the need to appeal to an ignorance or error hypothesis prevents the relativist from answering the linking problem.

This situation was deemed not surprising, given that a standard of knowledge is taken to be relevant at a given context because of certain practical or conversational factors, e.g. the practical matters at stake, the operant conversational purposes and presuppositions or the epistemic possibilities that have been mentioned or considered. Accordingly, speakers would regularly occupy contexts where different knowledge standards are in play and they would endorse such standards because they are practically or conversationally relevant at the context they occupy. As far as the pragmatic explanation accepted by relativists goes, then, there is nothing in how these factors are taken to operate in order to fix a knowledge standard that licenses someone to use the standard relevant at her context to assess assertions made from other contexts at which other knowledge standards are in play. We can be seen as endorsing a knowledge standard but –insofar as we do not impute ignorance or error to speakers- in an explicitly context related way: we endorse it, say, for the purposes of the conversation or given the practical issues at stake. How are we then supposed to be entitled to take our knowledge standard as cross-contextually superior, and so to assess assertions made from contexts where other such standards are in play using

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<sup>20</sup> Recall that this principle states that one cannot rationally believe/assert sincerely *p* now if one expects (is *certain* or *almost certain*) to be later justified (at a later context) to think that this belief token/assertion was inaccurate.

the knowledge standard in play in our context? Answering that we just happen to do that does not help, since our aim is to make sense of truth as assessment sensitive. Accordingly, simply claiming that our context is a right context of assessment without further ado is also unsatisfactory insofar as it leaves the notion of *right context of assessment* unexplained, and trying to spell it out in a case-by-case basis is the task we set ourselves to accomplish.

The case of personal taste, moral and aesthetic predicates differs from the case of knowledge ascriptions in the way the relevant standard is endorsed. Recall that **T** seems to be the rule for the proper application of “tasty,” and that other predicates of personal taste, as well as moral and aesthetic predicates, might have similar rules for their application. According to **T**, one usually endorses a standard of taste based on one’s own affective dispositions, and so one’s contextually relevant standard of taste does not change from context to context as long as one’s affective dispositions do not vary. In other words, taste standards are not usually fixed by conversational or practical factors associated with a particular context but by one’s own affective dispositions and values, which can be, at least for some period of one’s life, stable across contexts. Therefore, given the evaluative aspect of taste, moral and aesthetic predicates and the way they are applied in context, there is plausibility to the claim that in endorsing a taste, moral or aesthetic standard speakers usually take it as cross-contextually superior to all others. Assuming that these predicates express standard-neutral contents, this could explain the existence of apparent intractable disputes.

Now, under the assumption that these predicates have standard-neutral contents, if speakers usually take their own taste, moral or aesthetic standard as cross-contextually superior, we should either impute error to them (i.e. there would be no sense to be made of their standards being cross-contextually better than all others) or try to make proper sense of truth relativism. In order to do the latter thing, we need to give some explanation of how a speaker can be right (relative to her context of assessment) to consider her own standard as cross-contextually superior.

As we pointed out in chapter 4, the linking explanation that could help the relativist to answer Boghossian’s dilemma is subject (in cases other than the case of future contingents) to the following objection.<sup>21</sup> According to this linking explanation, once one occupies a context of assessment one cannot consider that an

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<sup>21</sup> We did not address this objection in the case of knowledge ascriptions and epistemic modals because in these cases we found other specific problems that undermine a truth relativist proposal.

assessment sensitive proposition is *literally* true as assessed from other contexts that determine different parametric values. Then, it could be argued, it does not make sense to say that truth and accuracy are relative to contexts of assessment. At most one could say that they are relative to the right contexts of assessment, namely the context one occupies plus all others fixing the same parametric values. But this may not strike us as a truth relativist position after all, since it does not seem to accept truly non-monadic truth and accuracy notions respectively relating propositions and assertions or belief tokens to a range of contexts of assessment licensing different truth and accuracy assessments. According to this line of argument, our preferred linking explanation makes truth relativism collapse into an absolutist position that provides no inter-contextual justification for the rightness of some contexts of assessment and the wrongness of others. In other words, it makes truth relativism collapse into a sort of absolutist-chauvinist view. And this would show that truth relativism is an unstable view: either it cannot provide an illuminating link between its technical truth notion and the ordinary one or –if it does provide such a link- it collapses into a chauvinist kind of absolutism.

How can the relativist attempt to face this objection? Well, as we pointed out in chapter 4, the relativist should, first of all, claim that the (structurally complex) monadic notion seen as equivalent to ordinary monadic truth, namely *truth at a right context of assessment*, is itself assessment sensitive (i.e. what is *right* can vary across contexts of assessment). As a result, adopting the notion of *right context of assessment* would be compatible with the avoidance of an absolute point of view regarding certain matters. But this simple answer is insufficient, since it is based on the notion of assessment sensitivity that we are trying to illuminate. Hence, the relativist has to offer some further explanation of what the *rightness* of a context of assessment amounts to. In particular, a relativist about a certain expression has to motivate the thesis that a perfectly rational and omniscient individual can occupy a particular perspective concerning the relevant matters in a way that gives rise to assessment sensitivity. Otherwise, the relativist would have to attribute ignorance to speakers who supposedly make assessment sensitive judgments, thusly undermining her proposal. And to motivate this thesis the relativist can, for instance, appeal to evidence showing the existence of intractable disagreements about issues on which we make truth judgments that are somehow indispensable in our lives. Smith (2010, 2012) does something along these lines.

Smith (2010) considers the sources that an apparent intractable dispute may have, and discards most of them as plausible sources of a genuine intractable disagreement offering us the strongest case for truth relativism.<sup>22</sup> A case of genuine intractable disagreement would be such that all common explanations of why the parties make apparently incompatible judgments are discarded, and in spite of this we would still consider that there is a genuine disagreement between them. For our purposes, we can see Smith's strategy as an attempt to single out the disputing situation that constitutes evidence for a genuine form of truth relativism that does not have to attribute ignorance or error to the disputing parties.

After recounting several possible sources a dispute can have (e.g. appealing to different comparative classes, using different standards or cut off points within a comparative class), Smith (2010, 31-32; 2012, 263-265) suggests that the scenario deserving a truth relativist account is one where there is a single taste standard in play shared by the disputing parties, despite their different judgments concerning a new stand-out case.<sup>23</sup> In brief, the idea, inspired by rule-following considerations put forward by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958),<sup>24</sup> is that what it takes to judge according to a standard may be open in cases where a novel sample shows up. As a result, each incompatible judgment can be, relative to the respective perspective or context of assessment of each judge, a continuation or extension of the standard. According to each of these perspectives or contexts of assessment, one disputing party would be wrong and the other right, and there would be no absolute point of view from which to decide between these two perspectives/contexts of assessment or to judge that both are equally correct. In Smith's words: "Each speaker will see herself as the keeper of the truth faith, continuing the erstwhile standard they had both previously subscribed to." According to this line of reasoning, cases that motivate a truth relativist account

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<sup>22</sup> Smith (2010, 18-25) analyzes an apparent intractable dispute actually held by two wine critics, Robert Parker and Jancis Robinson, about the 2003 Chateau Pavie from St Emilion. According to Smith, whereas Parker made judgments that can be roughly expressed by "2003 Chateau Pavie is an excellent Bordeaux," Robinson judgments can be roughly expressed by "2003 Chateau Pavie is not an excellent Bordeaux."

<sup>23</sup> François Recanati (2008, 93-94) and Isidora Stojanovic (2012) consider a similar case, namely one where several sources of an apparent disagreement are discarded but the appearance of disagreement remains. Both authors give a contextualist account of such a case. Whereas Recanati proposes a non-indexical contextualist account, Stojanovic (2012) defends an indexical contextualist one.

<sup>24</sup> Wittgenstein's (1958) view is not a truth relativist one but a sort of non-factualism about meaning. According to him, there is nothing in our past uses of a term that determines how it is to be understood and, as a result, how it should be further applied. Truth relativism, in turn, holds that faultlessly or intractably disagreeing parties can respectively assert and deny the same proposition, and so that they share meanings and concepts. Be that as it may, as Smith (2010, 31-32; 2012, 263-265) briefly suggests, Wittgenstein's insights can be used for truth relativist purposes.

are, for instance, cases where art or food critics are respectively faced with a new art style or flavour, and not everyday disputes over aesthetic or (gustatory) taste matters.<sup>25</sup>

Is this a promising approach to make sense of the notion of *right context of assessment*? I do not see how it could be, despite granting that there is no knock down argument against someone wishing to accept this line of argument to support truth relativism. Notice that, leaving the case of future contingents aside, there is still a tension between the idea that a rational and knowledgeable individual is committed to consider certain contexts of assessment as the right ones and the idea –behind the notion of intractable disagreement- that she has no inter-contextual (absolute) reason favoring these contexts over other ones. How can a rational and knowledgeable individual remain committed to the idea that certain assertions and token beliefs are accurate while the ones that contradict them are inaccurate once she realizes that there is no inter-contextual reason favoring the former ones over the latter ones? This question raises the suspicion that the instability charge we presented against truth relativism cannot be successfully answered in principle.

The attempt to make sense of his non-monadic truth notion in terms of ordinary truth makes the relativist address difficult philosophical issues that most contemporary proponents of the approach have avoided. As a matter of fact, Kölbel (2009) and MacFarlane (2011b, 444) assume that their theories are empirical and have no significant conceptual or metaphysical questions to answer.<sup>26</sup> I argued that this is not the case once we recognize the peculiar difficulty in providing a linking explanation that the relativist faces and we introduced in chapter 4. Thus, given the spirit behind most contemporary relativist proposals, the questions that any attempt to solve this linking problem raises constitute a drawback that truth relativism has.

In the next section I argue that there is an alternative non-indexical contextualist account of the data on disagreement and retraction that avoids facing such questions and does not have the problems we argued evaluative invariantism and indexical contextualism have.

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<sup>25</sup> Notice that personal taste, aesthetic and moral differences between members of different distant cultures would not be suited for this relativist account, since it might be clear that these people endorse different standards.

<sup>26</sup> In MacFarlane words: "...relativism about a particular domain of thought and talk is not a metaphysical thesis but a testable, empirical hypothesis –at least to the extent that any semantic theories are testable." (2011b, 444)

#### 8.4. A non-indexical contextualist account

Truth relativism about “tasty” is supposed to vindicate **T**<sup>27</sup> together with our disagreement and retraction judgments. In addition, it gives an easy explanation of our reporting practice and inter-contextual truth assessments involving this predicate. Non-indexical contextualism about “tasty” explains in the same way these reports and assessments and can also accept **T** as the rule for the correct application of “tasty.” However, as we pointed out in the second section, non-indexical contextualism does not vindicate a range of disagreement and retraction appearances involving this predicate. Therefore, if we concede to the relativist that such appearances exist, non-indexical contextualism together with **T** is committed to say that in many cases speakers are mistaken in taking themselves to disagree with others and in retracting earlier assertions. Similar comments can be made on any other idiosyncratically evaluative predicate.

Now, insofar as the existence of such disagreement and retraction appearances is conceded, there is a significant difference between the ignorance and error a non-indexical contextualist needs to impute and the ignorance and error an indexical contextualist needs to ascribe. Whereas an indexical contextualist needs to impute semantic ignorance and error to speakers (i.e. they would systematically fail to realize that their apparently disagreeing parties are asserting propositions that are compatible with the ones they are asserting), a non-indexical contextualist need not do this. This latter theorist can claim that speakers who get involved in apparent intractable or faultless disputes wrongly take their own standard as being absolutely (i.e. not merely in connection with some preferences and values) better than others, and this is a kind of non-semantic error analogous to, say, the one some people make in thinking that their own nation or football team is absolutely superior to others. And the same kind of error would explain the relevant retractions appearances. This is an advantage that non-indexical contextualism has over indexical contextualism, since I think it is undeniable that people tend to make this kind of chauvinistic mistakes. In addition, the view does better than evaluative invariantism insofar as it does not posit an objective tastiness property that leads to consider most of our uses of “tasty” as misguided. Nevertheless, I find implausible that all apparent

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<sup>27</sup> Recall that **T** runs as follows: apply “tasty”/“not tasty” to something just in case you have first-hand knowledge of its flavour and you like/dislike this flavour under appropriate conditions.

disagreements involving locutions such as (1) (i.e. “Mutton is tasty”) and (2) (i.e. “You are mistaken, mutton is not tasty”) are ultimately mere cases of doxastic non-cotenability where the appearance of preclusion of joint accuracy should be explained away by means of attributing chauvinistic error to speakers. Can non-indexical contextualism do better by vindicating some of these disagreement appearances? I think it can, but in order to do that it should deny that **T** is the only possible rule for the correct application of “tasty.”

As we shall see next, a non-indexical contextualist view on “tasty” together with a plausible rule **T'** for its application (or, more generally, an non-indexical contextualist account of an idiosyncratically evaluative predicate together with an application rule along the lines of **T'**) can give a reasonable explanation of some of the relevant disagreement appearances. In many cases we may also need to impute error to speakers in order to account for these appearances, but (i) such error is not semantic and (ii) it is a kind of error that we anyway have to impute to people in other aspects of their lives.

There are cases where the rule for the application of “tasty” is **T'** not **T**:<sup>28</sup>

**T'**: Apply “tasty”/“not tasty” to something just in case you have first-hand knowledge of its flavour and you approve/disapprove this flavour relative to a normative tradition you endorse.<sup>29</sup>

**T'**, unlike **T**, makes the proper application of “tasty” dependent on the speaker’s endorsement of a (vaguely defined) system of values belonging to a tradition that may have its socially acknowledged experts, e.g. food or wine critics. Accordingly, **T'** makes the accuracy of a use of “tasty” much more difficult to achieve than **T**, since a speaker can be wrong about the personal taste judgments that her normative tradition licenses. Does this make the application of “tasty” not entirely

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<sup>28</sup> It is worth stressing that I am not claiming that **T'** is always the application rule for “tasty.” There probably are many uses of “tasty” that are ruled by **T**. Andrea Iacona (2008) defends an indexical contextualist view on predicates of personal taste according to which these predicates admit different application rules similar to **T** and **T'** depending on the occasion of use.

<sup>29</sup> How could an analogous rule for an aesthetic or moral predicate be formulated? I take it that we can simply substitute “tasty” in **T'** for the predicate in question and “first-hand knowledge of its flavour” for a phrase referring to the knowledge required in order to make the type of judgment under consideration (e.g. first-hand knowledge of how a musical piece sounds or a painting looks like in the case of aesthetic predicates, or knowledge of what an action consists in or how a person behaves in the case of moral predicates).

idiosyncratic? It does not, since the speaker is supposed to apply the predicate insofar as she endorses the system of values of this normative tradition as one she is willing to shape his experience with a range of objects in accordance with.

Thus, the following vindication of at least some of the relevant disagreement appearances involving idiosyncratically evaluative claims is available to the non-indexical contextualist: speakers (tacitly) intending to judge according to the same normative tradition genuinely disagree, even if they are mistaken about the precise standard that such a tradition singles out (they would be, after all, intending to judge in accordance with the same system of values). To be sure, these disagreements would not be faultless and there is no *prima facie* reason to think that they would be intractable.

Be that as it may, the relativist can argue that the view cannot vindicate several disagreement appearances between individuals occupying (possibly distant) contexts where different normative traditions are relevant and, relatedly, retractions involving a change in the endorsed tradition. Moreover, a relativist that –like Smith (2010, 2012)- appeals to the openness of a standard or normative tradition could claim that the view does not even vindicate all disagreement and retraction appearances involving one single standard or normative tradition. The non-indexical contextualist would have to explain away these appearances by attributing error to speakers. Granting for the sake of argument the existence of such appearances, I close this chapter by noting that the type of error that non-indexical contextualism needs to impute is acceptable.<sup>30</sup>

Leaving aside the possible appeal to different comparative classes and so the failure to recognize this,<sup>31</sup> the attribution of error would take place in cases where we

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<sup>30</sup> To be sure, contextualists can argue that these (apparent) disagreement cases involve metalinguistic disagreements (Peter Ludlow 2014; Recanati, 2007; Stojanovic, 2012). A metalinguistic disagreement amounts to a discrepancy over how to apply a concept (or the term that expresses it) in cases where it is undetermined how to apply it. The parties could either disagree over which is the best way to apply the concept given some shared value or practical interest (Ludlow 2014) or simply have a *practical* or *emotional* discrepancy over how to apply it (Recanati 2007, 91-94; Stojanovic 2012, 113-114). Thus, contextualists have resources to vindicate some disagreements that are in the vicinity of the ones relativists claim that support their view. Accordingly, contextualists could argue that they can vindicate most of the relevant disagreement appearances. However, if we grant the relativist that there are appearances of preclusion of joint accuracy lending support to her view, and not just appearances of some sort of disagreement, we still need to attribute error to speakers. I next argue that, once these appearances of preclusion of joint accuracy are conceded, the error non-indexical contextualism has to attribute is not problematic.

<sup>31</sup> As we pointed out, we factored out in **T** and **T'** the possibility of speakers tacitly appealing to a comparative class in applying “tasty” (e.g. *tasty for having been cooked by a chef*). But the failure to

as observers or the apparently disagreeing parties chauvinistically take a given standard, normative tradition or simply some personal preferences to be absolutely (i.e. not merely in connection with some preferences and values) superior to others without rational justification. This is a non-semantic, chauvinist kind of error analogous to the one committed by an extreme nationalist or numerous fans of football teams. As a special case of this type of chauvinistic behaviour, we can think of a person who *correctly* applies “tasty” in accordance with **T**, not **T'**, and *wrongly* takes her own affective dispositions to be absolutely better than others. I take it that this is a type of error whose existence we should be ready to admit.

According to what we said, the type of ignorance and error non-indexical contextualism has to attribute is not semantic and there are in principle plausible explanations of it. In addition, the attributed ignorance and error does not undermine any linking explanation available to the non-indexical contextualist, since she need not assume that we must ignore her non-monadic truth notion in order to apply the ordinary monadic one. To conclude, non-indexical contextualism does better than the other views we considered, since it does not face the difficult questions truth relativism faces and it need not appeal to a particularly problematic ignorance and error hypothesis.

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notice that two allegedly disagreement parties appeal to different comparative classes could give rise to a misleading disagreement appearance.

## Final Remarks

To close, I would like to mention two morals that were drawn and two issues that were not addressed in this dissertation.

To begin with, I have argued for a characterization of truth relativism in terms of assessment sensitivity, since such a characterization is necessary for a proper understanding of relative accuracy. Be that as it may, the peculiarities found in the case of future contingents may make us reconsider our characterization as long as it treads on a general notion of assessment sensitivity. More precisely, this case suggests that our pre-theoretical understanding of what truth relativism is may correspond to specific kinds of assessment sensitivity involving non-world parameters in the circumstances of evaluation, so that two people can faultlessly disagree with each other in a single world.<sup>1</sup>

In the second place, I argued that Boghossian's dilemma creates a peculiar difficulty to provide an explanatory link between non-monadic truth and ordinary monadic truth to make sense of assessment sensitivity. A solution to this problem should be considered in a case-by-case basis. We found that in the case of future contingents we do not face this problem, and that in the rest of the cases there is no satisfactory solution to it. In the case of knowledge ascriptions and epistemic modals, truth relativism faces specific problems to provide such a solution. In turn, in the case of idiosyncratically evaluative predicates the possible answer cannot clearly face a general instability charge we first introduced in chapter 4. On the other hand, non-indexical contextualism does not face such problems and the evidence relativists adduce against this approach can be explained away.

Let us turn to the issues that I have not addressed. First of all, I did not attempt to analyze in detail the evidence adduced against indexical contextualism and evaluative invariantism but rather took for granted, for the sake of argument, its

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<sup>1</sup> As we pointed out, Kölbel (2002 116-118, 2008 4, 2009 375-376) considers that introducing in the circumstances some parameter over and above the world parameter is sufficient for being a truth relativist. I reject this way of classifying theories because it blurs the significant distinction between truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism. Once we take this distinction seriously, it becomes clear that the former view should be characterized in terms of assessment sensitivity. However, if we want our characterization to track a pre-theoretical conception of truth relativism, we may need to define this view in terms of forms of assessment sensitivity involving non-world parameters.

legitimacy. Since the former approach has many representatives, it is worth stressing this point. Certain *prima facie* disadvantages of non-indexical contextualist views introducing non-standard parameters in the circumstances (e.g. the divorce they establish between truth and accuracy), which I deemed non-serious in comparison to the problem faced by truth relativism, could become relevant if we undermined the evidence adduced against indexical contextualist alternatives.

Finally, I have not considered expressivist proposals but only truth-conditional ones, despite the fact that expressivist views on idiosyncratically evaluative predicates have been especially relevant. Classical expressivism about an expression holds that in using it in simple declarative sentences we do not assert a proposition but only express an attitude, and that this performed speech act exhausts the meaning of the sentence. This view is seen as having trouble to explain the logical relations that sentences deserving an expressivist treatment have with other sentences, as well as to explain how the former sentences embed in more complex ones (Peter Geach, 1960, 1965). However, contemporary views classed as expressivist are not subject to these problems. Moreover, comparing truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism with contemporary expressivist views could help to illuminate all these approaches. As an illustration, let us see some questions raised by comparing truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism with Allan Gibbard's (1990, 2003) expressivist view on normative discourse.

Contemporary expressivists, unlike classical ones, take the meaning of an expression as the state of mind that underlies its use. For instance, the difference between saying "That is round" and "That is good" is explained in terms of a difference between the underlying mental states: in the former case a (*thick*) belief is expressed, whereas in the latter a preference or something alike. Be that as it may, contemporary expressivists consider that we can talk about the belief or judgment that something is good in a *thin* and broad sense of "belief" or "judgment." Accordingly, they use a minimal truth predicate that satisfies the *Equivalence Schema* (i.e. it is true that  $p$  iff  $p$ ) and can be applied to all declarative sentences. Gibbard's (2003, 53-59) view combines these ideas with a full appropriation of the methods of truth-conditional semantics.<sup>2</sup> On his view, the content of any declarative sentence in context or any belief (broadly understood) is a set of *hyperstates*, those at

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<sup>2</sup> As a result, his view does not have the problems that classical expressivism has to account for logical relations and embeddings.

which the content is said to *obtain*. Hyperstates, in turn, are completely decided states of mind represented as pairs of worlds and *hyperplans* (i.e. plans that determine what to do in all contingencies).<sup>3,4</sup> Thus, no matter whether the mental state underlying the use of a sentence is descriptive, normative or mixed, compositionality of content is vindicated: the content of a disjunction is the union of the contents of the disjuncts, the content of a conjunction is the intersection of the contents of the conjuncts and the content of a negated sentence is the complement of the sentence's content.

In order to make the comparison easier, we can –following MacFarlane (2014, 171)- think of a Gibbardian view on predicates of personal taste that takes hyperstates to be pairs of worlds and tastes, and compare it to a truth relativist and a non-indexical contextualist view on these predicates that conceive of circumstances of evaluation as world/taste pairs. Once we translate “obtains at a world/taste pair” for “true at a world/taste pair,” this Gibbardian view has important similarities with the just-mentioned relativist and non-indexical contextualist views. All these views (i) assign to sentences in context contents that are sets of world/taste pairs or functions from these pairs to truth-values,<sup>5</sup> (ii) consider that these contents can be, in a general sense, believed, judge or asserted, and (iii) countenance a monadic truth predicate for which the *Equivalence Schema* holds (i.e. at a world/taste pair the extension of “true” is the set of sentential contents that obtain at this pair).

Can we see this expressivist proposal as a truth relativist or a non-indexical contextualist view? According to Kölbel (2002, 113-114) we can, but he does not specify to which of the last two proposals we could assimilate this Gibbardian view (recall that he takes non-indexical contextualism to be a form of truth relativism).<sup>6</sup> MacFarlane (2014, 172-175), in turn, thinks that there are substantive differences between this expressivist proposal and the corresponding truth relativist and non-

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<sup>3</sup> Thus, each hyperstate is seen as a way in which the represented state of mind could be maximally developed without a change of mind.

<sup>4</sup> It may be useful to give an example of how Gibbard (2003) conceives of content. Consider the sentences “I ought to go jogging” and “I ought to go jogging unless it rains,” as well as the supposedly underlying beliefs. The proposal holds that the content of the former sentence or belief is the set of all hyperstates whose hyperplans include a plan to go jogging at present, whereas the content of the latter sentence or belief is the set of all hyperstates whose hyperplans include a plan to go jogging at present just in case the world of the hyperstate is such that at present it does not rain.

<sup>5</sup> To be sure, only the content of a sentence containing a predicate of personal taste could obtain or fail to obtain, or be true or not true at a world/taste pair depending on the taste component.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth pointing out that Kölbel (2002) analyzes an earlier proposal by Gibbard (1990). Be that as it may, the differences between this proposal and the one presented in this section are not relevant to our purposes.

indexical contextualist ones. According to him, the expressivist generic use of “belief” masks an important psychological difference between thick beliefs and mere preferences, whereas truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism have a unified notion of belief despite holding that different types of content can be believed (i.e. assessment sensitive or insensitive contents in the case of truth relativism, and use sensitive or insensitive contents in the case of non-indexical contextualism). And this difference between thick beliefs and preferences would prevent the Gibbardian expressivist from having a unified account of assertion. In addition, MacFarlane (2014, 175) holds that this Gibbardian view does not have the resources to account for the disagreements and retractions lending support to truth relativism.

Can we distinguish truth relativism and non-indexical contextualism from Gibbardian expressivism in such ways? In particular, can the relativist coherently say that in believing assessment sensitive contents and believing assessment insensitive ones the very same mental state is involved? Besides, what should the Gibbardian expressivist say about accuracy and in particular about the accuracy of assertions? Should her view be seen as a form of truth relativism or non-indexical contextualism?

These are just some questions arising from considering Gibbard’s view that I have not addressed. A more encompassing study should deal with them.

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