

Logique & Analyse 208 (2009), 389–405

RELATIVISM, ASSERTION AND DISAGREEMENT IN MATTERS OF TASTE

FILIP BUEKENS

Assessment relativists have defended the view that certain uses of predicates of personal taste or modal locutions give rise to *faultless disagreement* (henceforth: FD): two utterances u and u' semantically expressing p and its negation $not-p$ can both be truthfully uttered by different speakers, and both speakers are *right* — they haven't made a cognitive or epistemic mistake and no semantic misunderstanding is involved. Consider the following examples drawn from recent contributions to the debate:

(Roller coaster)

A: The roller coaster is fun!

B: No, it's not fun.

(Chili tasting)

A: The chili is tasty.

B: No, the chili is not tasty!

(Sexy Porsches)

A: Porsches are sexy.

B: No, they are grotesque capitalist symbols!

Proponents of FD maintain there is a difference between disagreements over objective matters of fact and disagreements over non-objective matters of personal opinion or taste, and that the latter type of disagreement can be *faultless*. The examples are meant to illustrate this phenomenon and FD is taken to be *evidence* for the new relativism (Kölbel 2009). There exists, however, an old argument to the effect that FD is impossible. As Lasersohn (2005, p. 445) points out, many have argued that statements expressing matters of opinion or personal taste do *not* have truth conditions and so don't express propositions. They are non-assertive acts of affective expression. Utterances like 'This is tasty!' or 'The roller coaster is fun!' are best compared with reactions like 'Whee' or 'Cool!' or 'Yummy!' or 'Dunno!' which lack

truth-apt content and merely express the speaker's subjective reaction or attitude towards a contextually salient object, or state of affairs. The assessment relativist replies that, since (i) FD *is* a real phenomenon and (ii) disagreement requires that the speech acts contribute opposite propositional contents (the proposition affirmed by A is denied in B's contribution), the semanticist *is* challenged to account for the semantic properties of the sentences expressed, *given* that, as MacFarlane (2007a, p. 2) puts it, the truth of the claims put forward depends not just on how things are, but also on how things are with some subject or subjects who is not part of the subject-matter of the sentence. Assessment relativists hold that a semantic account of evaluative sentences requires a *relativized* notion of *truth*: the semantic value of the proposition expressed by a sentence in the context of utterance c_U must be relativized to an *index* or *circumstance of evaluation* c_E not only including a possible world but other parameters as well, such as a *taste parameter* or a *judge*, or perhaps a *perspective*. When A utters *The chili is tasty* his sentence is assessed or evaluated relative to a world and the agent's standards of taste, and assessment-relativists hold that it is the standard determined by the *assessor* that is relevant. In discourse that generates FD, the assessor selects his own standards as those against which the proposition he is presented with will be evaluated.

There is an alternative strategy for explaining the subjective element in utterances involving matters of taste — the contextualist strategy — that I will not explore in detail, but which is worth mentioning if only because it is the official target of the assessment relativist. Contextualists hold that the semantics of predicates of personal taste can be modeled after Kaplan's approach to indexicals and demonstratives (Kaplan 1989), which assigns them a content relative to a context of utterance. On this account, it is the context of utterance that provides a semantic value that is contributed to the proposition evaluated. How exactly the context of utterance provides that parameter and which semantic, cognitive or conventional mechanisms trigger the parameter is a matter of dispute. One could, for example, extend John Perry's (1986/1998) proposal, and argue that the standards of the speaker are *unarticulated constituents* of the proposition expressed by the speaker's utterance and are identified by reading off her communicative intentions. Another proposal would postulate hidden indexical parameters in the lexical-semantic structure of predicates of personal taste and define their content or extension in terms of character-rules that take the standards of the speaker in the context of utterance as arguments.

In what follows I will argue that both proposals neglect the *expressive dimension* of assertoric discourse that appears to give rise to FD. First, I argue, in agreement with many others, that FD cannot exist; nevertheless there is an

important and correct intuition behind the phenomenon which merits careful attention: the dialogues give rise to a *public conflict of interests*, and the expressive dimension of the assertion accounts for it. Acknowledging the expressive dimension of these assertions involves a plurality of speech acts performed by the speaker: a speaker can (i) utter a sentence that is true iff p , (ii) thereby assert that p^* (where p^* is an expanded or modified version of the semantic content of sentence he utters), and, moreover, (iii) express an attitude, emotion or feeling with the sentence uttered. The fact that an utterance carries an *expressive dimension* does not preclude that the sentence used to express the speaker's feeling, belief or sentiment has the same semantic content as when it occurs in contexts in which its use doesn't carry an expressive dimension or at least not the same expressive dimension.¹ What exactly the expressive dimension of speech acts amounts to will be explored in the course of this paper, but one thing should be clear from the outset: the classic Frege-Geach objections to standard expressivist or emotivist accounts of evaluative statements are well taken.² Moreover, it will also be taken for granted that sentences used in FD discourse need not give rise to FD. For example, I may very well use *Porsches are sexy* or *The roller coaster is fun* to assert what a lot of people think, as when summarizing an extensive empirical survey about cars or theme park attractions. Any problem with disagreeing with the asserted contents of such utterances has less to do with the use of predicates of personal taste than with well-known problems which have to do with the truth conditions and the evaluation of generics. However, the very existence of these uses of the same sentences supports the rejection of the original expressivist or emotivist proposal that such sentences lack truth conditions or (equivalently) do not express propositions.

1. *What is (Not) The Problem with Faultless Disagreement?*

All parties acknowledge that when A utters *Roller coasters are fun* in Roller coaster he speaks on the basis of his *own* affective reaction to roller coasters and is *authoritative* about it (Lasersohn 2005, p. 655). If one speaks from an acentric perspective, an utterance of the same sentence lacks the distinctive expressive dimension of its 'subjective' counterpart. (It may acquire other expressive characteristics.) Speaking from an exocentric perspective,

¹ 'A thought may have just the same content whether you assent to its truth or not; a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition' (Geach 1965, p. 449).

² See Schroeder (2008) for a recent defence of expressivism.

we intend to have our sentences assessed relative to contexts in which someone other than ourselves is specified and mutually known to be the judge (Lasersohn 2005, p. 670), but neither perspective requires the characteristic epistemic authority that comes with the egocentric perspective. Speaking on the basis of one's own affection and being authoritative about it will play a key role in explaining the expressive dimension of discourse that gives rise to the FD intuition.

FD is considered as evidence for assessment-relativism (Kölbel 2003, 2008, 2009, Lasersohn 2005, MacFarlane 2007, 2007a). That 'most people have a healthy pre-theoretical intuition that there can be and are faultless disagreements' (Kölbel 2003, p. 54), is, notwithstanding the remarkable confidence expressed by the author, *not* evident. Generally speaking, if X asserts that p and Y asserts that *not-p*, they *disagree* as to whether p , and at least one of them must have made a mistake, *i.e.* be at fault. Huw Price takes the incoherence of faultless disagreement to be a key ingredient of an argument that aims at explaining why we have the predicate *is true* and its counterpart *is false* in our language (and why, according to Price, minimalism about truth should therefore be rejected): if you assert that p and I assert that $\neg p$ I come up with a *criticism* or *condemnation* of the original utterance (Price 2002): you have asserted what is, according to me, *not* true. You may well be justified in claiming that p , but justification does not amount to truth and it is the very essence of the norm of truth that it gives disagreement its immediate normative character, a character on which dialogue depends:

'(T)he cautionary use of truth. . . , fixed by the rule

(R) It is a mistake to assert something not true

is a norm which speakers immediately assume to be breached by someone with whom they disagree, independently of any diagnosis of the source of the disagreement' (Price 2002, p. 2).³

Truth norm (R) is stronger than the norm that what one says should represent what one believes or (somewhat stronger) represent what one justifiably

³I cite Kölbel's (2003, p. 67) formulation. The rule Price has in mind is best read in its negative formulation: If not- p , then it is *incorrect* to assert that p ; if not- p , there are *prima facie* grounds for censure of an assertion that p (Price 2002, p. 10). Kölbel (2003) assumes that FD (as defined by him) entails that Price's truth-principle must be rejected for particular types of discourse. A variant of the rule (If p and one judges that not- p , then one is at fault), forms the basis of a simple formal proof that FD is impossible in Wright (2001) and Kölbel 2003, par. 2.

believes. Were the latter norms central, disagreement would *not* be treated as an indication that one speaker or the other is mistaken, but merely as indicating that both speakers have different beliefs or have good grounds for their contradicting assertions (Price 1998, p. 246).⁴ Paul Boghossian voices scepticism about DF as follows: 'I am doubtful that we can ultimately make sense of the notion of a proposition that can sustain faultless disagreement. I don't see how any such proposition could serve as the plausible object of belief, the very thing for which the notion of a proposition is needed.' (Boghossian 2006, p. 36–37)⁵ Since neither Price nor Boghossian identify areas of discourse that could claim exception to (R), they suggest that the rule governs our assertoric practice; alleged exceptions must be explained away.⁶

Not all arguments against FD are equally convincing. As Crispin Wright (2006) points out, opposition to FD need not rest on an implausible form of *objectivism* about taste: what speakers bring into the open in paradigmatic FD discourses like Roller coaster or Tasting chili is how they evaluate things (objects, events) in the utterance situation and this is perfectly consistent with the possibility that one may later change one's mind, or that tastes can change. On the other hand, speaking about a past experience or attitude towards the object or event the predicate is applied to clearly modifies the expressive dimension of the utterance: an important characteristic of expressive content and the expressive dimension of assertions is that, as Cruse (1986) points out, they tell us something about the utterance situation itself: what is expressed is a (mental) state present in the context of the utterance. In

(Past roller coaster)

A: That roller coaster in Buenos Aires was fun.

B: No, it wasn't fun at all.

it is hard to hear a case of FD: A and B disagree about what they once experienced, and so nothing seems to be lost in Explicit past roller coaster which does *not* exemplify, according to the standard definition of FD, and as acknowledged by MacFarlane and Kölbel, genuine cases of FD:

⁴ But see Kölbel (2003) for dissent.

⁵ Compare Horwich 1990, p. 75, who states that a basic rule for the proper use of 'not' will include 'the principle that one never assert both 'a is F' and 'a is not F'.

⁶ Others who reject FD are Glanzberg (2008), Iacona (2008), Stanley (2005) and Stojanovic (2008). None of these authors explore the direction taken in this paper.

(Explicit past roller coaster)

A: I found that roller coaster in Buenos Aires fun.

B. No, I didn't like it at all.

This suggests that, just as truth is immune to epithetical colour (Kaplan 1999), so is the truth of the content *asserted* immune to the expressive dimension carried by the assertion: we can change or remove the expressive dimension of an utterance without affecting the content asserted: asserting *According to my standards the roller coaster is fun* shares its asserted content with the utterance of *The roller coaster is fun* (as used in Roller coaster) but the latter utterance carries an expressive dimension that the former lacks.

Crispin Wright also points out that the antagonists may, perfectly rationally, stick to their views *after* the difference comes to light, a feature he calls the *sustainability* of one's contribution to the conversation (Wright 2006, p. 39). What accounts for sustainability is, as we have seen, that the speaker enjoys a specific form of first person authority over his *current* (not past) overall attitude toward the relevant object or event. This is consistent with the possibility that his attitudes or experiences could change. Someone can stick to his guns and continue to claim that the roller coaster is fun for him and simultaneously realize that he (like many others before him) will eventually end up finding rides on roller coasters boring and uneventful.

Response-dependence theories about taste (and related matters) reject proposals to objectify deliciousness or funniness and propose that what *deserves* those qualifications is determined by what well qualified judges find to be so. The problem with this proposal is that, as Wright (*ibid.*, p. 39) points out, in simple disputes about relatively primary reactive attitudes we are simply not tempted to refer to experts, *i.e.* people more qualified than us. On the contrary: we consider ourselves to be perfectly well qualified as appropriate judges in basic matters of taste (*ibid.*). MacFarlane too rejects that truth claims about deliciousness or what's funny do not depend on *our* affective reactions (MacFarlane 2007a, p. 3–4).

The first problem for proponents of FD that focus on predicates of taste is that they owe us a demarcation of subject matters about which FD is possible. However, this is more easily said than done. Lasersohn holds that determining 'which predicates qualify as predicates of personal taste is an interesting question' (Lasersohn 2005, p. 644) but he postpones the discussion. My general concern is twofold: firstly, if, as the proponents acknowledge, FD is a restricted phenomenon, it seems legitimate to ask which predicates give rise to it and to merely provide a mere list of plausible candidate ('funny',

‘spicy’, ‘disgusting’, ‘cool’) is uninformative, as we are not told which principle unifies the list. Secondly, one could question whether not every predication, in an appropriate context and used in a particular right tone of voice, could give rise to cases that intuitively fall under FD. Hawthorne & Cappelen (2009) suggest the example *Now that’s a knife!*, uttered in a discussion among Australians over what are ‘really good knives’ (think of *Crocodile Dundee*). The following dialogue, spoken in the right tone of voice, has been proposed as a specimen of FD by Friederike Moltmann:⁷

(Sleeping on the sofa)

A: One cannot sleep on this sofa.

B: One can sleep on this sofa.

In *Sleeping on the sofa* the speakers do not explicitly refer to themselves, but the interlocutors are correctly taken to give expression to different attitudes toward the object — the sofa — and under that reading the FD intuition clearly emerges. The example illustrates an important feature of the expressive dimension of these utterances: a speaker need not *describe* her exact attitude to express it and no *description* of her negative attitude towards the dormative properties of the sofa would exactly capture what she *expresses*. Moreover, what is *expressed* or *shown* by uttering these sentences reveals an attitudinal conflict: if B rejects the attitude A has given expression to, he loses credibility — in this case, his credibility in judging dormative properties of sofas, and this is perfectly consistent with B’s coming to know that, according to A, one can’t sleep on the sofa in question. We’ll come back to this later.

An important feature of accounts of FD by its proponents is the *unisono* rejection of the classical Ayer-type expressivism, an account on which ‘it is impossible to dispute questions of value because it is impossible to dispute questions about value’ (Ayer 1946, p. 110, quoted by Kölbel 2003, p. 65). Kölbel’s dialectical move is to argue *from* FD *to* a rejection of classical expressivism: since, according to Kölbel, FD is a genuine phenomenon involving incompatible propositions, expressivism must be rejected (cf. *supra*). Hawthorne and Cappelen (2009) reject expressivism and opt for ‘playing the game of broadly truth-conditional semantics as opposed to expressivism’ (p. 112–113, ms). This is unfortunate, since Cappelen’s own version of speech act pluralism leaves ample room for acknowledging the expressive dimension of utterances over and above the content(s) asserted,

⁷ During a discussion in Paris.

or said (Cappelen & LePore (2004)).⁸ Neither Kölbel, MacFarlane or Wright consider whether alternatives to traditional expressivism can account for the undisputed phenomenon that uttering sentences like *This is tasty* in the right tone of voice and in conversations in which they characteristically generate the FD intuition *express* subjective states of the speaker and, when denied by others, reveal a conflict of interest about the subject matter.⁹

2. *Faultless Disagreement, What is Asserted and What is Expressed*

To make a plausible case for the relevance of the expressive dimension of assertions that contribute to discourse seeming to give rise to FD, we should remind ourselves that all cases involve overt or public disagreement, a feature easily missed if one considers Kölbel's original definition:

'A faultless disagreement is a situation where there is a thinker A, a thinker B, and a proposition (content of judgement) p such that: A believes (judges) that p and B believes (judges) that not-p, and neither A nor B has made a mistake (is at fault) (Kölbel 2003, p. 54)

We all may or may not have incompatible *beliefs* about what's delicious, spicy or fun, but we're not constantly involved in actively disagreeing about matters of taste, which is what happens in discourse that generates FD. Secondly, by locating the problem at the level of thought, it is unclear why a proposal about the semantic treatment of predicates — elements in a public language — would help solve the problem of FD on the level of thought. Thirdly, Kölbel's characterization a priori excludes that the expressive dimension of utterances could be relevant to the issue, since expressivism explicitly pertains to acts that *show*, or *reveal*, one's attitudes (Green 2007). Fourth, when in the grip of a mood, feeling or attitude, we might also attempt to keep it inside (Green 2007, p. 23), but it would be curious if even those who hid their attitudes with great success could still be taken to be actively disagreeing with each other. Both Lasersohn and MacFarlane discuss FD under the assumption that it involves *public* disagreement. A better description of FD is provided by Stojanovic (2008):

⁸ See also Soames (2002, 2007) for further elaboration of the distinction between semantic content and the content asserted. Accepting this terminology doesn't entail that correct contextualist insights should be overlooked.

⁹ There are of course other sources of non-coassertability. Consider: "P, but I don't believe that P".

- (i) For any two utterances u and u' to a conversation C , the utterer of u' disagrees with the utterer u only if: if u is true, then u' is false, and if u' is false, then u is true
- (ii) The utterer of u disagrees with the utterer of u'
- (iii) On the assumption that they are sincere, u is a true utterance, and so is u' .

If FD exists, the assessment-relativist argues, lemma (i) must be revised, and it is at this point that the assessment relativist formulates his master argument: a contextualist solution does not respect the FD-intuition, and must therefore be rejected. MacFarlane (2007) presents the argument as follows: 'The contextualist takes the subjectivity of a discourse to consist in the fact that it is covertly about the speaker (or perhaps a larger group picked out by the speaker's context and his intentions). Thus, in saying that apples are 'delicious', the speaker says, in effect, that apples are good to her (or to those in her group). In saying that a joke is 'funny', she says that it appropriately engages her sense of humor (or that of her group). (...) This kind of view has obvious appeal. It explains how the truth of the claims at issue can depend both on how things are with here explicit subject-matter (say, apples) and on how things are with a subject or subjects who is (*sic*) not explicitly mentioned. And it does so in a perfectly straightforward way, invoking semantic mechanisms that are already also needed to handle more familiar kinds of context sensitivity exhibited by indexicals and demonstratives, quantifiers and gradable adjectives.' But, MacFarlane continues, '(T)he contextualist solution has a price. If in saying 'apples are delicious' I am saying that they taste good to me, while in saying 'apples are not delicious' you are denying that they taste good to you, then we are no(t) disagreeing with each other ... Intuitively, though, it does seem that we are disagreeing. We certainly take ourselves to be disagreeing. I may say: 'Wrong!' or 'That's false', neither of which would be appropriate if you had said explicitly that apples taste good to you' (MacFarlane 2007, p. 18).

Lasersohn considers a technical variant of contextualism, *i.e.* introducing in the meaning of the sentence (the proposition expressed) an unarticulated constituent rather than hidden arguments: the sentence *Roller coasters are fun* means something like (expresses the proposition) *that roller coasters are fun according to my criteria for judging fun* and *The chilli is tasty* means (expresses the proposition) *that the chilli is tasty according to my criteria for judging tastiness*, where the extensions are unarticulated in the semantic content but present in the contextually enriched proposition. But, Lasersohn continues, 'This solution can't be right, however... because of the relation between content and contradiction... If I say 'Roller coasters are fun', and

you say, 'No, roller coasters are not fun', on this analysis, you are not contradicting me, because the negated sentence doesn't express the same content for you as it does for me. In effect, (on this account, FB) my utterance means roller coasters are fun for me, and your utterance means roller coasters aren't fun for you, and there is no conflict between those at all — indeed, there is no reason to think we disagree in any way, on this analysis' (Lasersohn 2005, p. 649). Since Kölbel, MacFarlane and Lasersohn assume that FD is a correct intuition, a contextualist strategy for analyzing utterances in FD discourse must be rejected and assessment relativism must be adopted.¹⁰

However, this move overlooks an important feature of FD-exchanges that non-FD dialogues arguably don't exemplify: that in making the reference to standards or judges *explicit*, the expressive dimension of the original utterance *changes* or even goes *missing*: the 'lost disagreement argument' does not acknowledge this phenomenon (cf. *supra*). Call this *the problem of lost expressivity*. To see the point, consider the following question: why is a perfectly analogue proposal for assessment-relativism about taste, for example monetary relativism, though technically kosher, *unmotivated*? Consider the predicate 'is expensive':

(Expensive Porsches)

A: Porsches are expensive.

B: No, they're not. They are cheap.

A and B can use different monetary parameters, and when these parameters are made explicit it will become clear whether A or B has made a cognitive mistake, or have used different standards. Why couldn't this give rise to a form of monetary relativism?

(Monetary relativism)

'a is expensive' is true relative to $\langle w, t, m \rangle$ iff for some contexts c_1, c_2, c_3 , 'a is expensive' is true as used in c_1 and assessed from c_2 , but not true as used in c_1 and assessed from c_3 (keeping w and t constant).

Although technically impeccable, the proposal is unmotivated: Expensive Porsches doesn't generate the FD intuition and, as we have seen, it is the FD

¹⁰ See also Wright (2006, p. 39–40) for a brief discussion. Soames 2003, p. 303ff. nicely documents that G.E. Moore and C.L. Stevenson used exactly the same argument against forms of egoism in ethics, roughly: the view that ethical statements are psychological claims about what one prefers.)

intuition that fuels the semantic proposals underlying assessment relativism. However, there is another feature that distinguishes Expensive Porsches from Sexy Porsches: in the latter case, but not in the former, reference to the subject is not confined to its role as judge or provider of standards (standards for sexiness, standards for expensiveness); in Sexy Porsches a feeling, attitude or experience is involved not just in its role as standard but also qua mental item being *expressed* or *shown* by the speaker. Hence, assessment relativism oversees an aspect of Sexy Porsches, Roller coaster and Chili tasting not present in Expensive Porsches: the presence *c.q.* absence of the FD intuition correlates with the presence or absence of the expressive dimension of the contributing utterances. This suggests further evidence for a link between the FD intuition and the expressive dimension of the contributing utterances.

Before we explore this further, we must consider a second argument against assessment relativism. None of the parties in the debate over FD can reasonably deny that contributions to FD-dialogues can be *correct assertions*. Even when B in Roller coaster would have said 'No, it's not', he would have used a sentence uttered by A to assert that roller coasters are fun for him. One way to appreciate the contextualist intuition that the level of content he identifies is *indispensable*, is that what is left unarticulated in the semantic content of the sentence used must be part of the content *asserted* by the speaker. Why is that so? Because qua assertors, the contributors to FD discourse transmit knowledge, and they can be taken to obey constitutive rules for correct assertions. A now popular proposal for the constitutive rule of assertion is formulated by Williamson (2000):

(Rule of Assertion)

One must (assert *p* only if one knows that *p*)

The Rule of Assertion puts constraints on what one can take the speaker to have asserted, which is, as contextualists and speech act pluralist can agree on, an enriched and/or modified version of the utterance's semantic content. Consider the contribution of A to Roller coaster: the *asserted* content — the content identified by the contextualist — is what the audience comes into a position to know, namely that, *according to the speaker, the roller coaster is fun*. That is what the intended audience comes to know, and what the speaker asserts. The intended audience does not thereby come to know *that roller coasters are fun* for the audience may in fact hate roller coasters. If the contributors act according to the Rule of assertion — and there is nothing that prevents them from doing so — FD is inexistent for they assert different propositions.

The argument shows that a further level of content in FD discourse (discourse that, as I have said, generates the FD-intuition) is relevant: the content asserted by the speaker accounts for the successful exchange of knowledge. However, taking into account only the content asserted by the speaker in those discourses also results in the loss of communicated information — information obtained by interpreting the speaker as *showing* something that isn't asserted and in some sense *could not be asserted*. If one takes the proposed asserted content of A in Roller coaster to be that roller coasters are fun for him, and assumes that content to be explicitly uttered, as in

(Explicit roller coaster)

A: The roller coaster is fun for me.

B: It's not fun for me.

the expressive dimension of the original utterances is seriously modified. (And consider the loss of expressivity if one identifies the standard of assessment with, for example, a group of people.) Since in Explicit roller coaster the same asserted contents are in play as in Roller coaster, something else must be responsible for generating the FD intuition that comes with Roller coaster but not with Explicit roller coaster.

If this is correct, we should expect that, if it is common knowledge among those involved that the speakers do not adopt the egocentric perspective, the expressive dimension, insofar as it pertains to the feeling or state expressed in the original egocentric examples, is absent and that no FD intuition will arise. Consider a conversation about young Billy, who is having a ride on the roller coaster:

(Billy on the roller coaster)

A: The roller coaster is fun.

B: No, it's not fun at all.

(Compare Lasersohn 2005, p. 672.) Since it is mutual knowledge that A and B are talking about Billy's experiences, the contributions fuel neither the FD intuition nor assessment relativism. Technically, the assessment-relativist approach can be extended to these cases (as Lasersohn and MacFarlane convincingly show), but the original *motivation* for the proposal rested on cases in which the FD intuition arises, and these were uniformly cases which came with an expressive dimension: the speakers were expressing, *i.e.* showing, certain attitudes (that is why the old expressivist theory about evaluative statements struck a chord with so many). Note, moreover, that in Billy on the roller coaster there *is* a genuine disagreement: A asserts, while B denies,

that Billy is having fun on the roller coaster. The asserted content is an expansion of the semantic content of their utterances and they do not disagree about the generic proposition that the roller coaster is fun. That proposition (or its denial) was not what they intended to assert. Notice that a correct resolution of the asserted content for the Expensive Porsche case follows the same pattern, yet no information seems to be lost.

A final argument for the claim that proponents of FD have overlooked a level of expressive content involves a case which cannot, on the proponents' account, qualify as an exchange that exemplifies FD, although it has the look and feel of a genuine FD case because the utterance's manifest expressive dimension. Consider a dispute over ice-cream in the *gelateria*:

(Banana or strawberry)

A: This is delicious!

B: No, That's delicious!

Since A and B semantically express different propositions (they are pointing to different types of icecream), Banana or strawberry cannot represent a case of Faultless Disagreement, although opposite attitudes are expressed and neither of the speakers seems to be at fault. I conclude that, even if the FD intuition can arise in contexts that do not give rise to what assessment relativists take to be genuine cases of FD, and even if a correct identification of the content asserted in FD exchanges must allow for knowledge to be transmitted (there is no disagreement on the level of asserted content) a sense of disagreement or conflict remains palpable. What, then, is responsible for the FD intuition?

3. *Empathy and Subject-transcendence*

Over and above making perfectly compatible assertions, speakers involved in FD discourse *express* different attitudes by their utterances. What is expressed by the speaker — the attitude — is relevant *in* the context: by showing their attitude (feeling, sentiment) the participants make public a (perhaps mild) attitudinal conflict. The inner state expressed must in some sense remain *unarticulated* for it to be successfully expressed. This connects the expressive dimension of a speech act with what Potts (2006), in a discussion of expressive words, calls its *descriptive ineffability*. A speaker is not only in general unable to articulate precisely the content of the expressive dimension of his assertion; but uttering a sentence that makes explicit reference to his

standards, his attitude, tends to modify the expressive dimension, which suggests that the expressive dimension of an utterance is not reducible to some propositional or descriptive content in the content asserted. Note, however, that, since the expressive dimension reveals something about the speaker and its correct interpretation constitutes *evidence* about the speaker's emotional state, epistemic sentiment or gustatory preferences, expressing those states *is* evidence and for that very reason propositional (see Williamson 2000 for an extensive defense of the propositional character of evidence). That proposition is not expressed, but rather a third-personal characterization of the evidence gathered by having a speaker interpreted as expressing an attitude, feeling or sentiment. The fact that we can characterize having expressed an attitude α by a speaker S as evidence that S has attitude α does not entail that what the speaker expresses is a proposition.

Following Green (2007), the expressive dimension of speech acts follows the general pattern of self-expression:

(Self-Expression)

Where A is an agent and B a cognitive, affective or experiential state of a sort to which A can have introspective access, A expresses her B if and only if A is in state B, and some action or behaviour of A's shows and signals her B (Green 2007, p. 43)

If a speaker utters *Porsches are sexy*, he asserts that Porsches are sexy for him, and thereby *presents* himself to the intended audience as knowing that Porsches are sexy for him. Furthermore, by *expressing* his positive attitude (here obviously aided by the metaphorical use of the (evaluative?) predicate *sexy*) he also shows and signals that attitude. The contributions to discourse that seems to give rise to FD make public the speaker's attitudes by expressing them; the primary result is not so much a factual disagreement on the level of asserted content, but a revelation (by expressing the relevant attitude) of an attitudinal difference that will play an important role in subsequent coordination of further interactions.

What is the function of expressing an attitude? Expressing a cognitive, affective or experiential state characteristically creates a commitment for the speaker in that it narrows down his options: sticking out one's neck creates a liability to error or exposed insincerity: if the speaker is not in the mental condition expressed, she is subject to a loss of credibility (Green 2008, p. 275, who refers to work in evolutionary psychology on *handicaps*). By expressing his attitude the speaker shows to what extent he is prepared to

stick out his neck not only with respect to the *presence* of the attitude (i.e. could not be mistaken about it), but also with respect to its *aptness*.

Correctly applying the knowledge rule of assertion meant that a level of asserted content has to be recognized: one comes to know how the agent evaluates things, and it is impossible to disagree with what you come to know and in fact accepts as knowledge. The 'no fault' intuition reflects that the speaker, in expressing his attitude, was right about the presence of the attitude. But merely *asserting* that (say) roller coasters are fun for him seems too weak for what he also wants to achieve: that the intended audience minimally recognizes that attitude as being apt or correct. To achieve that, giving expression to it *is the perfect means*, because understanding the expressive dimension of the speaker's utterance requires from the audience a form of *empathy*: the intended audience must imagine *herself* as having the feeling (emotion, attitude) that she ascribes to you, and the imagined reaction must be more or less accurate. The audience is thus forced to form a similar attitude, which is an excellent means to get her to adopt your attitude our sentiment. Once you have put the audience in your shoes, they are more likely to come to your aid, join your choices, or to become your allies (Green 2008, p. 187). This accounts best for the subtle but neglected *subject-transcendent* dimension of contributions to dialogues that give rise to alleged cases of FD: it is as if the speaker, by committing himself to his judgment, takes on an additional responsibility: expressing is a bit like saying 'Just think of how confident I am that I *express* my attitude!' (compare Green 2007, p. 7). A purely semantic approach to utterances in which one *describes* that one has a feeling, emotion or epistemic sentiment loses that aspect of FD discourse, and it is a remarkable fact that this dimension is neglected, given that so many cases of alleged FD work most convincingly when speakers are taken not as *merely describing more or less accurately* their personal reactions to public items but as *giving perfect expression to them*.

So there are at least two ways in which uttering *Roller coasters are fun* changes the context of the conversation by adding information to it: first, the utterance changes the context in virtue of the fact that you now come to know *that I find roller coasters fun*. Secondly, when *expressing* my attitude, my utterance invites you to *simulate* for yourself fun that could be had on the roller coaster, and that may be a first step towards actually getting you on the roller coaster (or ordering chili, or appreciating Porsches).

Tilburg University

E-mail: f.a.i.buekens@uvt.nl

REFERENCES

- Audi, Robert (2008), 'Rational Disagreement as a Challenge to Practical Ethics and Moral Theory: An Essay in Moral Epistemology', in Quentin Smith, *Epistemology: New Essays*. Oxford: OUP, pp. 225–248.
- Ayer, Alfred.J. (1948), *Language, Truth and Logic*. 2nd edition. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Boghossian, Paul (2006), 'What is Relativism?', in P. Greenhough and Michael P. Lynch (eds.), *Truth and Realism*, Oxford: UP, pp. 13–37.
- Cappelen, Herman & Ernie LePore (2004), *Insensitive Semantics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cappelen, Herman & John Hawthorne (2009), *Relativism and Monadic Truth*. Oxford: UP.
- Cruse, D.A. (1986), *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geach, Peter (1965), 'Assertion', *Philosophical Review* 74:449–65.
- Glanzberg, (2007), 'Context, Content, and Relativism', *Philosophical Studies* 136: 1–29.
- Green, M. (2007), *Self Expression*. Oxford: UP.
- Green, M. (2008), 'How Do Speech Acts Express Psychological States?', in S. Tsohatzidis (Ed.), *John Searle's Philosophy of Language: Force, Meaning and Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horwich, P. (1990), *Truth*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kaplan, David (1989), Demonstratives, in Almog et al., *Themes from Kaplan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kaplan, David (1999), *What is Meaning?* Ms, UCLA.
- Kölbel, Max (2003), 'Faultless Disagreement', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104: 53–73.
- Kölbel, Max (2009), 'The Evidence for Relativism', in *Synthese* 2009: 375–395.
- Lasersohn, Peter (2005), 'Context-Dependence, Disagreement, and Predicates of Personal Taste'. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 28: 643–686.
- MacFarlane, John (2007), 'Relativism and Disagreement', in *Philosophical Studies* 132:17–31.
- MacFarlane, John (2007a), 'Truth and Subjectivity' (unpublished).
- Moltmann, Friederike (2009), 'Relative Truth and the First Person', in *Philosophical Studies* 134 (online first).
- Perry, John (1986/1998), 'Thought Without Representation', reprinted in J. Perry, *The Problem of the Essential Indexical and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Potts, Christopher (2006), 'The Expressive Dimension.' *Theoretical Linguistics* 32 (2): 165–197.

- Price, Huw (1983), 'Does 'Probably' Modify Sense?' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 61: 396–408.
- Price, Huw (1988), 'Two Paths to Pragmatism II'; in R. Casati and C. Tapolet (eds.), *European Review of Philosophy* 3: 109–47.
- Price, Huw (2002), 'Truth as convenient friction', *Journal of Philosophy* 100: 167–190.
- Schroeder, Mark (2008), *Being For: Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism*. Oxford: UP.
- Soames, Scott (2002), *Beyond Rigidity: the Unfinished Agenda of Naming and Necessity*. Oxford: UP.
- Soames, Scott (2003), *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century. Volume 1: the Dawn of Analysis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Soames, Scott (2007), 'The Gap Between Meaning and Assertion', ms.
- Stanley, Jason (2005), *Knowledge and Practical Interests*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stojanovic, Isidora (2008), 'Talking about Taste: Disagreement, Implicit Arguments, and Relative Truth', *Linguistics & Philosophy*.
- Wright, C. (2006), 'Intuitionism, Realism, Relativism, and Rhubarb', in P. Greenhough and Michael P. Lynch (eds.), *Truth and Realism*, Oxford: UP: 38–60.