An extension of relativist attitude reports

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Abstract. Relativist compositional semantic frameworks have often been motivated by the desire to do justice to a notion of faultless disagreement, but a clear exposition of this notion, and a demonstration that these compositional frameworks capture it, has remained elusive. This work elucidates and extends the relativist tradition through the examination of its treatment of belief reports, in two steps: (i), by showing how a relativist semantics as already proposed in the literature allows for a straightforward and substantive notion of faultless disagreement cast in terms of belief; and (ii), by showing that this notion is applicable to a far wider range of cases than have been historically treated by relativists, but to which the relativist framework can extend. I demonstrate that a relativist semantics captures this notion of faultless disagreement by allowing that distinct agents can incur distinct descriptive commitments as to how the world is in virtue of believing the same thing, and then show that a novel interpretation of the relativist notion of perspective-sensitivity, in terms of the factual conditions under which an agent is willing to apply an expression, rightly allows for the characterization of faultless disagreement as a ubiquitous phenomenon not triggered by a special class of predicates.

1 Introduction

Though accounting for so-called faultless disagreement has been one of the central motivations for constructing a relativist compositional semantics, it is often left inexplicit in the relativist literature itself what this notion ultimately amounts to, or how the proposed compositional frameworks actually formally accommodate it.¹

There are many senses in which a scenario might be described as a case of disagreement, and many senses in which such a disagreement might be ‘faultless.’ This has made the notion of faultless disagreement something of a moving target, and a recent explosion of literature has addressed many potential senses of faultlessness, and many potential senses of disagreement, asking whether a relativist semantic framework can accommodate them, or whether various non-relativist frameworks might be able to (for some discussion and references, see Cappelen and Huvenes 2018; Zeman 2020). It has become unclear what the stakes are, so much so that MacFarlane (2014: §6.7) does not attempt to make good

¹An exception here is MacFarlane (2014: §6.7), mentioned just below: included among the delineation of varieties of faultlessness and disagreement provided there are notes about how various semantic frameworks can or cannot allow for those notions. This is an interesting exercise, but I’m not sure any of the proffered notions satisfyingly get at what the relativists often seem to have in mind.
on a notion of faultless disagreement in a relativist framework in general, opting instead
to explicate a variety of candidate notions and evaluate them separately, and ultimately
concluding (ibid.: 136) that ‘If one does not want to be misunderstood, it is best to avoid
the phrase “faultless disagreement” entirely.’

While MacFarlane’s pessimism is understandable, I want to suggest that there is a rather
straightforward and substantive notion of faultless disagreement that a suitable relativist
semantics captures in a clear and demonstrable way. The purpose of the following exercise
is twofold: first, to explicate that notion, and demonstrate how an appropriate relativist
semantics of the sort already described in the literature can be shown to deliver it; and
second, to show that this notion of faultless disagreement occurs in a wide variety of cases
that relativists have not concerned themselves with in the past, and to show how the relativist
semantics can be extended to cover them.

Disagreement (in its stative as opposed to eventive sense: cf. Cappelen and Hawthorne
2009: 60-61) is often taken to concern beliefs, and specifically beliefs held by distinct agents
that are in some way incompatible. The focus of this work will therefore be the semantics
of attitude reports in a relativist semantics, and specifically the truth conditions involved
in reporting that distinct agents have conflicting beliefs. This is a perspicuous approach,
given that the notion of faultless disagreement was originally explicitly cast, e.g. by Köbel
(2004), in terms of beliefs in just this way. So, the focus will be on pairs of reports like the
following.

(1) a. Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty.
    b. Bethany thinks licorice is not tasty.

The idea is that these reports state that Alfonse and Bethany have conflicting beliefs in
some way, but that nevertheless, under certain circumstances (say, if they both accurately
represent their own tastes regarding licorice in holding these beliefs), neither is mistaken

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2Part of the problem is that the characterization of faultless disagreement in Köbel (2004) invokes such
murky phrases as ‘making a mistake,’ and Köbel himself doesn’t do much to clarify in what sense this is
meant, except to offer that believing a falsity is a kind of mistake. Relativists tend to treat the notion as
a crucial informal motivator for their semantic frameworks, but seldom explicitly explain how the formal
additions they offer to the semantics vindicate this informal notion. This can be seen in key relativist works,
like Köbel (2002) and Lasersohn (2005), which spend a long time informally laying out the phenomenon,
and then later on, after developing a semantic proposal, offer only cursory and somewhat hard to interpret
remarks as to what the phenomenon actually amounts to in terms of that very formal system (e.g. in Köbel
2002: 103-104; Lasersohn 2005: §7.3). The lack of clear stakes in these debates therefore partly reflects a
lack of clear stakes in the relativist literature, which this paper aims to help correct.

3The discussion surrounding faultless disagreement in the literature has shifted over time largely to
discussions of conversational disputes, often involving echoic denial, of the ‘A: This is tasty. / B: No, it
isn’t!’ sort. Part of the reason for this is that relativists often exposit their views informally using such
constructed exchanges as motivators, or have appealed to these dialogue moves explicitly as markers of
disagreement (e.g. Stephenson 2007: 493). I think this is unfortunate, since the notion was not initially, and
still is not in substance, foremost about the structure of conversational exchanges, or contextual parameters
governing conversation, meaning that some responses to the relativist literature have in a sense missed the
point (cf. Lasersohn 2017: 30-31 for an expression of a similar complaint). I take faultless disagreement to
really be about belief, as Köbel did, with the faultless properties of disagreement exchanges in conversation
falling out of the properties of belief, combined with an ordinary pragmatics of how various speech acts
commit agents to belief in various contents.
to hold the belief that they do. The faultlessness expressed here is supposed to stem from the
lexical semantics of the predicate *tasty*, which is somehow special: it’s a ‘predicate of
personal taste,’ and so is ‘perspective-dependent,’ or something of the sort. By contrast,
pairs of reports like (2) are not supposed to allow for the same sort of faultlessness.

(2) a. Alfonse thinks licorice is vegetarian.
    b. Bethany thinks licorice is not vegetarian.

The idea here is that the lexical semantics of *vegetarian* differs in some crucial way from
that of *tasty*: it’s not a relevantly ‘perspective-dependent’ expression, so it’s a ‘matter of fact’
whether licorice is vegetarian, and in believing these things, Alfonse and Bethany disagree
as in (1), but in virtue of disagreeing in this way, one must be making some sort of mistake.
As we’ll discuss in Section 6, this is a misleading way of describing things, but it works for
present purposes. A relativist semantics, in short, is supposed to assign an entry for *tasty*
that reflects its perspective-dependence, and causes it to differ from *vegetarian* in such a way
that the disagreement reported in (1) can be faultless, while the disagreement in (2) cannot
be.

The notion of faultless disagreement I’d like to demonstrate that a relativist semantics
delivers is what I’ll call descriptively faultless disagreement. I say it’s a ‘straightforward’
notion in that it just consists of stapling together a banal notion of disagreement with a banal
notion of faultlessness. We characterize the notion as follows, taking ‘π’ and ‘ρ’ as variables
over objects of belief, whatever those are:

(3) If in *w*, *x* believes π and *y* believes ρ,
then *x* and *y* descriptively faultlessly disagree in doing so iff_{def}:
    a. π and ρ are doxastically incompatible;
    b. *x* makes no descriptive error in believing π;
    c. *y* makes no descriptive error in believing ρ.

The two key notions in this definition are that of doxastic incompatibility, and that of
making a descriptive error in holding a belief. When I say that two beliefs are doxastically
incompatible, I mean just that no single agent in a world can believe both without represent-
ing the world incoherently, that is without committing to a factual contradiction, or taking
the world to be some way it couldn’t be. By making a descriptive error in holding a belief,
I mean that in virtue of holding the belief, the agent takes the world of belief to be some
way it actually isn’t, or in other words makes a factual mistake. How these notions work in
specific semantic frameworks will be spelled out in what’s to follow.

The definition in (3) is close to the one provided in Köbel (2004), but makes the notions
of disagreement in virtue of belief and faultlessness more explicit. Furthermore, it does so

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4Of course there are all sorts of constructions, not just those involving ‘predicates of personal taste,’ that
have been proposed to be amenable to relativist treatment, but I’ll just stick to the *tasty* cases here, using
the tired old *Licorice is tasty* example. Two difficulties should be kept in mind about this example, though I
won’t address them: first, it introduces genericity in virtue of the kind subject stimulus *licorice*, and second,
the present tense of the copula introduces an imperfective aspect, which has effects also relating to genericity,
and the interpretation of the predicate as dispositional in a certain way (cf. fn. 13). I take it this won’t
affect the points made below.
in very banal terms: disagreement involves distinct agents holding beliefs that represent the world mutually incompatibly, and descriptive error involves making a mistake about the way the world is. As it turns out, a relativist semantics can accommodate the notion in (3).

There are two reasons for focusing on this construal of faultless disagreement. First, as regards the theoretical concerns of relativists, this seems to be the notion that many authors have in mind; one reason for thinking this is that this it is precisely the notion that the relativists’ compositional frameworks tend to be capable of capturing, though it’s usually not spelled out explicitly how the frameworks achieve this.

But second and more importantly, I think this is a salient and correct pre-theoretical description of the sense in which cases like (1) actually can be faultless disagreements. One can’t think that licorice is both tasty and not tasty, without representing the ‘objective’ features of licorice (its flavor) incoherently, and in thinking what they do, neither Alfonse nor Bethany really does represent the world in some way it’s not, so long as they really do and don’t like the taste of licroice, respectively. To the extent that such scenarios are described as cases of faultless disagreement, this is often what’s meant, and so it’s worthwhile to show that a certain semantic theory can deliver this notion.5

A word on the nature of this exercise, before going forward: this is not an introduction to relativist semantics. Important foundational documents include Köbelie (2002); MacFarlane (2003); Richard (2004); Lasersohn (2005); Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson (2005); and Stephenson (2007). More mature and complete expressions of the position are in MacFarlane (2014) and Lasersohn (2017). No arguments for adopting a relativist semantics over its various purported competitors will be provided;6 rather, this work takes place within the relativist tradition, and acts as an elucidation of some of its features, as well as an extension of its basic outline to treat fresh phenomena.

Section 2 spells out in detail a standard intensional semantics for belief reports, and demonstrates that on such a semantics, descriptively faultless disagreement is not possible. Section 3 then modifies the compositional framework into a relativist semantics, drawing most heavily on the treatment in Lasersohn (2017). Section 4 examines the treatment of belief reports in a relativist semantics, evaluating proposals in the relativist literature, and ultimately deciding on a treatment derived from Stephenson (2007) that allows for a characterization of beliefs directed at relativist intensional objects simpliciter. Section 5 then shows how relativist belief reports, like their non-relativist counterparts, place predictable descriptive commitments as to how the world is on their believers, but nonetheless do so

5I’ve not come across any relativist literature explicitly defining or defending this notion of faultless disagreement, though it’s the one that I think lies behind most of these pre-theoretic intuitions. The closest I’m aware of is MacFarlane’s (2014: 134) notion of ‘faultlessₐ disagreementₐ,’ which is disagreement due to doxastically noncoherent but mutually accurate beliefs; but ‘accuracy’ is a technical notion of MacFarlane’s, which doesn’t map onto the notion of descriptive error advanced here. The present approach will also shed light on Köbelie’s (2002: 100) maxim, that it is an error to believe something not true in one’s own perspective. We’ll see that doing so on the present approach actually entails a descriptive, or factual, error.

6In particular, there will be no reference to, or comparison with, so-called ‘contextualist’ semantics for perspective-dependent expressions in what follows, except in footnotes, where the cursory mentions will simply take for granted that the reader knows what I’m talking about. I also will not address directly the various lines of attack on the notion of faultless disagreement, questioning whether relativists can handle the notion, or whether it makes sense to begin with, e.g. in Glanzberg (2007); Stojanovic (2007); Iacona (2008). In actually elaborating on the notion, I’ll have made clear why I’m unconvinced by this skepticism.
in such a way that distinct agents can incur distinct descriptive commitments in believing the same thing. This in turn allows for an explicit characterization of descriptively faultless disagreement. Section 6 then offers the titular extension of the semantics, by showing that descriptively faultless disagreement is not restricted to a certain special class of predicates, but is ubiquitous, and extends the relativist treatment to predicates generally. Section 7 concludes with some thoughts about the meaning of the change.

2 A non-relativist semantics

We start with a standard intensional semantics, on which all expressions have their extensions evaluated relative to a possible world parameter. We write $'\alpha^w$ for the extension of expression $\alpha$ at world $w$, and say that for each expression $\alpha$ of extensional type $\tau_\alpha$, its intension is of type $⟨s, \tau_\alpha⟩$, or a mapping from possible worlds to extensions of the appropriate type. The intension of a truth-apt expression, like a finite indicative clause, is then of type $⟨s, \hat{t}⟩$, or a proposition, i.e. a mapping from worlds to truth values. Throughout this paper, we omit reference to times, for convenience. 7

As usual, propositions act as the intensions of clauses embedded by belief reports. We then need to characterize what it is for an agent to have a belief directed at one of these intensional objects. We will take the intuitive content of a belief report to pertain to the believing agent’s descriptive commitments in holding the belief, i.e. the commitments placed on the agent as to how it takes the world it inhabits to be. This is undoubtedly not the only relevant commitment incurred by a believer (belief also likely entails certain kinds of social commitments, or dispositions to action, for example), but it will be the only one we’re concerned with here.

In order to explicate how an agent takes on descriptive commitments in virtue of believing a proposition, we have to say a bit about how propositions are assessed for truth or falsity. To believe a proposition is to take it to be true, and since a proposition is a mapping from worlds to truth values, this means taking it to be true at some world(s). A proposition may be true at some worlds and false at others, and it is a world-neutral object, in that it intrinsically specifies no specific world relative to which it’s to be assessed for a truth value. This means that if we want a coherent notion of what it is to believe a proposition simpliciter, some conventional value must be provided for the world parameter as the target of belief.

In line with our notion of descriptive commitments above is the idea that belief in a proposition is targeted at the world of the belief: that is, the agent that believes a proposition takes it to be true at the world that it inhabits (as opposed to being true in some counterfactual or fictional scenario). 8 That is, if in $w$ an agent assess a certain proposition

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7 In particular, there are two places where the original relativist literature referenced in this paper makes use of time parameters that are left out here: (i) perspectives, as taken over from Lasersohn (2017: §5.2) in Section 3, were originally cast as individual-time-world triples, not individual-world pairs; and (ii) in the semantics of Stephenson (2007), as introduced in Section 4.2, there were originally both times of evaluation in the compositional semantics, and times in the centered doxastic alternatives, making those alternatives also originally world-time-individual triples.

8 Though see Köbel (2002: 109-110), as to how the target of belief might change, precisely when a fictional assessment is relevant.
\(\phi\) as true, then it commits to \(\phi(w)\) being true.

To spell this out, it helps to adopt MacFarlane’s (2005) notion of a context of assessment. Informally, a context of assessment is a set of concrete circumstances in which a truth assessment of a proposition might be made, i.e. a situation in which an agent might take a proposition to be true or false. Formally, we can treat any such context \(c'\) as a tuple of parameter values, which contains at least an assessor of the context \(c'_a\) (the agent who makes the assessment), and a world of assessment \(c'_w\) (the world in which the assessment is made).

We then offer a notion of a proposition being true as assessed from a context. This spells out the conventional target of belief when a truth assessment is made: to take a proposition to be true in \(c'\) is to take it to be true as assessed from \(c'\) (and likewise for falsity), meaning that the agent who so assesses takes on whatever descriptive commitments are entailed by this. So according to what we’ve said, we have the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
(4) & \quad \text{a. } \phi \text{ is true as assessed from } c' \text{ iff } \phi(c'_w) = \text{true}.
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
(4) & \quad \text{b. } \phi \text{ is false as assessed from } c' \text{ iff } \phi(c'_w) = \text{false}.
\end{align*}
\]

This just says that where an agent believes a proposition, it commits to it being true at the world of the belief: it is therefore the context of assessment that provides a value for the world parameter in assessing propositions for truth (see Lasersohn 2013: §7, on the world parameter being fixed by the context of assessment).\(^9\) Note that the schema in (4) specifies only what commitments an agent would take on, if it were to believe or disbelieve a proposition in a certain context. That is, it explicates what it is to believe a proposition in that context: it says nothing about whether any proposition actually is or would be believed in that context, by the assessor of the context or anyone else. Finally, we say that there is a constitutive link between assessing a proposition as true (that is, taking it to be true), and believing it: to believe a proposition is just to assess it as true. With these preliminaries in hand, we can draw up a non-relativist compositional semantics for belief reports.

Following the classical Hintikka possible-worlds semantics for belief states and reports, we take the doxastic alternatives of an agent \(x\) in world \(w\), or \(\text{Dox}_{x,w}\), to be a set of worlds representing the total set of descriptive commitments that \(x\) has in \(w\): that is, an agent’s set of doxastic alternatives contains all and only those worlds that are live candidates according to the agent for the world it might inhabit, or which are possible ways that world might be, according to the descriptive commitments of their beliefs.

\[
\begin{align*}
(5) & \quad \text{Dox}_{x,w} := \{w' : \text{in } w, \text{ x entertains the possibility that it is in } w'\}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^9\)Three notes here. First, the world that truth assessment targets is the world of the context of assessment, not the actual world: while all actual assessments target the actual world, counterfactual assessments target the way the world would be in that counterfactual scenario. Second, the relevant world is the world of the context of assessment, not the world of the context of use: propositions do not have unique ‘contexts of use’ to begin with, not being linguistic objects (and thus the traditional Kaplanian notion of truth of a sentence in a context, which appeals to the world of the context of use, is inapplicable here). Third, since MacFarlane (2003), MacFarlane has claimed in various places that the substantive distinction between a relativist and non-relativist semantics is that the former allows that some expressions in the language are ‘assessment-sensitive’ (cf. MacFarlane 2014: ch. 3, esp. §3.3). To the extent that the world of assessment is always appealed to in the assessment of the truth of propositions, this is misleading: non-relativist semantics has always effectively implicitly invoked ‘assessment-sensitivity’ in the pragmatics of truth assessment.
We then write an entry for the belief verb *think*, which takes a proposition and an agent, and as standard universally quantifies over the agent’s doxastic alternatives, requiring that the proposition be true at all of them. This effectively means that in virtue of believing φ, an agent must take the world it inhabits to be such that φ is true at it: and this is just a way of spelling out the commitments required by the schema in (4).

\[
\text{think}^w = \lambda \phi_x. \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_x,w[\phi(w')]
\]

A belief report like *Alfonse thinks licorice is vegetarian* is then composed as follows, where the copula is vacuous, *licorice* simply denotes the individual l, *Alfonse* denotes a, and the entry for *vegetarian* is the standard one in (7), with the metalanguage predicate ‘vegetarian’ read ‘disquotationally,’ such that *vegetarian*(w)(x) is true iff x is vegetarian in w.

\[
\text{vegetarian}^w = \lambda x. \text{vegetarian}(w)(x)
\]

\[
\text{Alfonse thinks licorice is vegetarian}^w = \text{think}^w(\lambda w'. \text{licorice is vegetarian}^w)(\text{Alfonse}^w) = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_x,w[\text{vegetarian}(w')(l)]
\]

This belief report attributes certain descriptive commitments to Alfonse: in virtue of holding the belief, he is required to limit his doxastic alternatives such that he must take the world to be a certain way. These descriptive commitments can be represented by the set of worlds that verify the belief, which is just the set of worlds in which licorice is vegetarian. In general on a non-relativist semantics, the descriptive commitments can be represented just by the set of worlds at which the believed proposition is true, as in (9), where desc.comm(x, w, φ) is the set of worlds representing the descriptive commitments x would incur in w by believing φ. Alfonse’s specific commitments are as in (10).

\[
\text{desc.comm}(x, w, \phi) = \{w' : \phi(w')\}
\]

\[
\text{desc.comm}(a, w, \lambda w'. \text{vegetarian}(w')(l)) = \{w' : \text{vegetarian}(w')(l)\}
\]

This is just to say that by believing that licorice is vegetarian, Alfonse takes the world to be a certain way: licorice must be vegetarian (whatever that means). Note crucially that according to the schema for determining descriptive commitments in (9), it doesn’t matter which agent believes a proposition, or in what circumstances: the descriptive commitments incurred are always the same. We’ll see in Section 5 that the analogous principle doesn’t hold on a certain relativist semantics for belief, and that distinct agents can incur distinct descriptive commitments by believing the same thing. This will turn out to be important for how a relativist semantics licenses the possibility of descriptively faultless disagreement.

It’s now possible to show that descriptively faultless disagreement as characterized in Section 1 above is impossible on this standard intensional semantics: in the same world, no two agents can believe propositions that are doxastically incompatible, without at least one of them making a descriptive error in doing so. To do this, we first need to lay down definitions for doxastic incompatibility, as well as for making a descriptive error.
Two propositions are doxastically incompatible just in case in any world they cannot both be believed by the same agent without incurring incoherent descriptive commitments: in other words, no agent can believe both in a world without representing the world incoherently, or taking the world to be some way it can’t be. We represent this state of descriptive incoherency using the empty set of doxastic alternatives, and characterize the notion as follows.\footnote{This notion of doxastic incompatibility is one that depends only on the incompatibility of the two propositions believed in general, and not on any independent doxastic commitments that the agent might otherwise hold. One could of course define other notions of doxastic incompatibility that take the rest of the agent’s belief state into account: two propositions might be doxastically incompatible only in virtue of other descriptive commitments held independently by the believer.}

(11) $\phi$ and $\psi$ are doxastically incompatible iff, def:
\[ \neg \exists w, \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{x,w}[\phi(w') \land \psi(w')] \land \text{Dox}_{x,w} \neq \emptyset. \]

We then say that to make a descriptive error in believing a proposition is to incur descriptive commitments in virtue of that belief that are incompatible with the world of belief. In other words, the world of belief is not among the set of worlds compatible with the truth conditions of the proposition. Not to make a descriptive error just means the opposite, that the world of belief is among these worlds.

(12) a. If $x$ believes $\phi$ in $w$, then $x$ makes a descriptive error in doing so iff:
\[ w \notin \text{desc.comm}(x, w, \phi). \]

b. If $x$ believes $\phi$ in $w$, then $x$ makes no descriptive error in doing so iff:
\[ w \in \text{desc.comm}(x, w, \phi). \]

Now in $w$, let it be that (i) $x$ believes $\phi$ and $y$ believes $\psi$; and (ii) $\phi$ and $\psi$ are doxastically incompatible. We can show that either $x$ makes a descriptive error in believing $\phi$ in $w$, or $y$ makes a descriptive error in believing $\psi$ in $w$: therefore, their agreement is not descriptively faultless.

First, since $\phi$ and $\psi$ are doxastically incompatible, they cannot be mutually true at any world: that is, there is no $w'$ such that $\phi(w') = \text{true}$ and $\psi(w') = \text{true}$. For suppose that there is such a world $w'$: then there is a nonempty set of worlds (containing at least $w'$) that verify both propositions, i.e. $\{w' : \phi(w') \land \psi(w')\}$. But then there is an individual $y$ and world $w''$ such that $\text{Dox}_{y,w''} = \{w' : \phi(w') \land \psi(w')\}$. But then $y$ believes both $\phi$ and $\psi$ in $w''$, since its doxastic alternatives all verify both, and as said above, its set of doxastic alternatives is nonempty. Therefore, $\phi$ and $\psi$ are by (11) not doxastically incompatible, since $y$ can believe both in $w''$ while having a nonempty belief set. So by reductio, we reject the assumption, and conclude that there is no $w'$ such that $\phi(w') = \text{true}$ and $\psi(w') = \text{true}$.

But then in $w$, either $x$ makes a descriptive error in believing $\phi$, or $y$ makes a descriptive error in believing $\psi$. For suppose neither did: then by (12b) and (9), $w \in \{w' : \phi(w')\}$ and $w \in \{w' : \psi(w')\}$, and this just means that $\phi(w) = \text{true}$ and $\psi(w) = \text{true}$. But per the last paragraph, this is true of no world, and so it is not true of $w$. So we have a contradiction, and by reductio we reject the assumption, and conclude that in $w$ either $x$ makes a descriptive error in believing $\phi$, or $y$ makes a descriptive error in believing $\psi$. 

\[8\]
So descriptively faultless disagreement as defined in Section 1 is not possible on this standard non-relativist semantics. The descriptive commitments incurred by agents in believing doxastically incompatible propositions cannot mutually correctly describe any world, meaning that at least one such proposition must describe the world of belief of the agents incorrectly, and therefore at least one agent must be making a descriptive error in virtue of holding that belief.

On a relativist semantics, the analogous conclusion need not follow. We now turn to developing such a semantics: in Section 3, we lay out the basic relativist machinery; in Section 4, we offer a relativist semantics of belief reports; and in Section 5, we demonstrate how this results in a treatment of the descriptive commitments attending belief that allows for the possibility of descriptively faultless disagreement.

3 A relativist semantics

To implement a relativist semantics, we have to make two changes to the picture presented above. The first change complicates the intensional semantics of expressions, whose extensions will be evaluated with respect to an additional, non-world parameter. The second change requires us to re-characterize the pragmatics of truth assessment, in order to explicate how speakers form beliefs towards the resulting intensional objects.

First: we say that the extension of any expression is evaluated with respect to a perspective parameter, in addition to a world parameter (this terminology originally comes from Köbel 2002, but the formal treatment here is derived from Lasersohn 2017). A perspective is a pair \( \langle j, v \rangle \) consisting of a judge individual \( j \) and a world \( v \): it is thus effectively a world-bound individual, or a centered world. We write ‘\( \alpha \)’ for the extension of the expression \( \alpha \) at world \( w \) and from perspective \( p \). The domain of intension-forming objects \( D_s \) then contains not worlds, but world-perspective pairs, and for each expression \( \alpha \) of extensional type \( \tau_\alpha \), its intension is of type \( \langle s, \tau_\alpha \rangle \), or a mapping from world-perspective pairs to extensions of the appropriate type. Function application then works as usual, operating on the new intensional parameter (see e.g. Lasersohn 2017: 98 for a specific implementation).

Expressions that are not relevantly ‘perspectival,’ including \( \text{vegetarian} \) in Section 2, are idle on the perspective parameter, and so their lexical entries change only vacuously, as in (13).

\[
\text{vegetarian}^{w,p} = \lambda x.\text{vegetarian}'(w)(x)
\]

Expressions that are relevantly ‘perspectival,’ including predicates like \( \text{tasty} \) as noted in Section 1, vary their extensions on the perspective parameter, and so this parameter needs to be substantively invoked in drafting their lexical entries.

In order to provide an entry for \( \text{tasty} \), it’s first necessary to characterize the core lexical semantics of the expression, which pertains to the production of gustatory pleasure. This step is often left implicit by relativists, but it is crucial going forward for having a coherent account of what it is for something to be tasty ‘from a perspective,’ which essentially involves a stimulus being disposed to produce gustatory pleasure according to the experiential dispositions of that perspective.\(^{11}\) We therefore first define a metalanguage predicate ‘\( \text{tasty} \)'
(with two apostrophes, to signal that it non-trivially appeals to both intensional parameters) as follows. It takes a world, perspective, and stimulus individual into a truth value:

\[(14) \, \text{tasty}''(w)(j,v)(x) := \text{true iff:} \]
\[
\text{at } w, \, x \text{ is normally disposed to produce gustatory pleasure in any individual with }
\text{the experiential dispositions of } j \text{ at } v. \]

Thus the metalanguage predicate tracks whether a certain stimulus \(x\) is constituted at \(w\) in a certain way: namely, its ‘objective’ qualities relevant to its flavor (its ingredients and composition, let’s say) are such that it is disposed to produce gustatory pleasure in any individual also constituted a certain way (the way that the world-bound individual that makes up the perspective is constituted).\(^{12}\)

There are a few features of this predicate that go unexplained here, because they are not formally relevant to what follows. I will not explicate the notion of being ‘normally disposed’ any further, but take its precise characterization to be an issue with dispositional predicates generally.\(^{13}\) I will not explicate further exactly what properties are relevant to a stimulus’ flavor, or an experiencer’s experiential dispositions, nor exactly what causal relation ‘produce’ tracks (presumably, some sort of contact with taste receptors is needed), nor exactly what sort of experience counts as gustatory pleasure. Note that because this predicate takes a perspective argument, its truth or falsity at these parameters is an ‘objective’ matter: given a world, a stimulus in theory either will or will not be disposed to produce gustatory pleasure in certain individuals in this way, and this is not a matter of anyone’s opinion.\(^{14}\)

a lexical semantics for \textit{tasty} that works like this. See MacFarlane (2014: §7.1.1) for brief comments on the notion of liking a flavor, and Lasersohn (2017: §7.2) for similar comments on liking a smell, for the verb \textit{stink}. Relativists often gloss truth from a perspective using dative constructions, e.g. in terms of what is tasty ‘to’ an experiencer, and I take it that in the object language the notion of being ‘tasty to’ tracks gustatory pleasure in this way. The only writer I am aware of who denies that \textit{tasty}’s lexical semantics pertains to gustatory pleasure is Sundell (2016), but his reasons are unclear, and I think the claim can’t possibly be right: Sundell claims that \textit{tasty} instead merely tracks what an object ‘tastes like,’ and while this is correct, the feature of ‘what it tastes like’ that it tracks is precisely whether its flavor is pleasant.

\(^{12}\) The idea here is that an individual at a world has a certain set of experiential dispositions, which might be shared by other individual-world pairs with the same dispositions. The reason we say, ‘in any individual with the experiential dispositions of \(j\) at \(v\),’ rather than just ‘in \(j\) at \(v\),’ is due to subtleties in the modal evaluation of perspectival predicates: speakers can sometimes evaluate such predicates using their actual experiential dispositions, even at worlds in which their own dispositions would be different, or at which they don’t even exist: cf. Lasersohn (2005: 663, fn. 13); MacFarlane (2014: §7.2.11).

\(^{13}\) Relativists typically don’t make clear whether truth from a perspective (or analogous parameter) is to be read dispositionally or not – that is, they do not specify whether such truth for experiential predicates requires an actual experience having taken place, or merely that a certain disposition to having that experience holds. For reasons I won’t get into here, it turns out that the dispositional notion is the correct one. However, this applies only to the predicate \textit{is tasty} in the very specific grammatical environments we examine here: elsewhere, the predicate can be used to report on specific events of producing gustatory pleasure, in which case an actualized reading emerges. How and why this happens is ill-understood: my hunch is that it has to do with aspect, and that the dispositional reading surfaces in imperfective constructions.

\(^{14}\) Of course, the problems actually run deeper than this. Even specifying a world and perspective, one may still ask all sorts of questions as to whether the predicate truly applies: as to whether a certain experience ‘counts’ as pleasant, as to with what regularity a stimulus must produce that experience in order for the dispositional reading to be satisfied, and so on. But these sorts of indeterminacy in truth are not of the specific \textit{kind} that the relativist is typically concerned with.
With this metalanguage predicate in hand, we can give an entry for \textit{tasty} as follows. I assume, following the works of Lasersohn and MacFarlane generally, that \textit{tasty} does not compose with an internal argument representing an experiencer or perspective, but only with a stimulus argument, though nothing important hinges on this for a relativist semantics.\footnote{Cf. Lasersohn (2017: 148). That a relativist semantics can allow for such an internal argument is shown by Stephenson (2007).}

\begin{equation}
\text{\textit{tasty}}^{w,p} = \lambda x_c.\text{tasty}''(w)(p)(x)
\end{equation}

And so the extension of \textit{tasty} takes a stimulus individual, and returns true just in case that stimulus, in the world of evaluation, is normally disposed to produce gustatory pleasure in any individual that has the experiential dispositions of the perspective of evaluation. The composition of our perspective-dependent sentence from Section 1, \textit{Licorice is tasty}, is then straightforward, as in (16a), again assuming that the copula is vacuous, and the intension of the clause is as in (16b).

\begin{equation}
\begin{aligned}
\text{a. } & \text{\textit{licorice is tasty}}^{w,p} \\
&= \text{\textit{tasty}}^{w,p}(\text{\textit{licorice}}^{w,p}) \\
&= \text{tasty}''(w)(p)(l)
\end{aligned}
\end{equation}

\begin{equation}
\begin{aligned}
\text{b. } & \lambda\langle w, p \rangle_s.\text{\textit{licorice is tasty}}^{w,p} \\
&= \lambda\langle w, p \rangle_s.\text{tasty}''(w)(p)(l)
\end{aligned}
\end{equation}

So \textit{Licorice is tasty} is true at a world \(w\), and from a perspective \(p\), just in case at \(w\), licorice is normally disposed to produce gustatory pleasure in any individual with experiential dispositions like those of the judge of \(p\) in the world of \(p\).

The intension of a truth-apt expression like the finite indicative clause \textit{Licorice is tasty} is therefore an object of type \langle s, t \rangle, which on a relativist semantics is not a proposition, but rather a function from world-perspective pairs to truth values. We call an object of this type an \textbf{r-proposition}: and so a relativist semantics takes r-propositions, not classical propositions, to be the intensions of truth-apt expressions generally.

Second: r-propositions have their truth values relative to both a world and perspective. In order to make sense of how speakers evaluate their truth values, it is therefore necessary to give an account of how they conventionally set values for both these parameters in doing so. As before with classical propositions, this means providing a target of truth assessment in a context of assessment \(c'\). The only difference is that now the pragmatics of truth assessment must provide a schema for inserting a value for the perspective parameter, as well as for the world. The schema in (4) from Section 2 can be modified as follows, where \(\Phi\) is a variable over r-propositions, and \(c'_p\) is the perspective contextually relevant in \(c'\).

\begin{equation}
\begin{aligned}
\text{a. } & \Phi \text{ is true as assessed from } c' \text{ iff } \Phi(c'_w, c'_p) = \text{true}. \\
\text{b. } & \Phi \text{ is false as assessed from } c' \text{ iff } \Phi(c'_w, c'_p) = \text{false}.
\end{aligned}
\end{equation}

So as not to prejudge the issue, we make no commitment yet as to how the value of \(c'_p\) is set: this will be discussed in the next section. The idea for now is simply that for an assessor to take an r-proposition to be true (or false) in \(c'\) is for that assessor to take that r-proposition to map the pair containing the world they themselves inhabit, and some contextually relevant perspective, to \textit{true} (or \textit{false}).
As with the assessment of classical propositions, the notion of truth as assessed from a context in (17) specifies the conventional pragmatic target of truth judgments in a relativist semantics. Since there is a constitutive link between truth assessment and belief, an agent that believes an r-proposition to be true or false will incur whatever commitments are imposed according to this schema. With these notions in hand, we can move on to provide a relativist semantics of belief, and so belief reports, and explicate what descriptive commitments on the believer this semantics entails.

4 Relativist belief reports

The starting point for a relativist semantics of belief reports is that the object of belief is not a proposition, but an r-proposition. This makes good sense given what we said in Section 2, that one effect of a relativist semantics is to complicate the objects that serve as the intensions of linguistic expressions: on the treatment here, this means replacing propositions with r-propositions as the intensions of finite indicative clauses. From the additional standard assumption that the intensions of these clauses serve also as the objects of speech acts and mental attitudes, it follows that what speakers assert, deny, believe, realize and so on are not propositions, but r-propositions.\textsuperscript{16}

There is no technical impediment to writing a denotation for a verb like think that takes an r-proposition as its first argument. But any such denotation is just a placeholder, unless it can be elucidated in terms of the intuitive notions governing belief that play a role in speakers’ ascriptions. We saw in Section 2 that for propositions, these notions can be partly explicated by the descriptive commitments that believing a proposition places on an agent: to believe $\phi$ is to take $\phi$ to be true, which is in turn to take the world that one occupies to be among those that $\phi$ maps to true. We would like a working relativist semantics of belief reports to make sense of taking an r-proposition to be true, and to be intelligible in terms of this same notion of descriptive commitments.

A plausible treatment along these lines could be trivially given on a relativist semantics, for any r-proposition whose extension at a point of evaluation is idle on the perspective parameter. To do this, we could say that an r-proposition is true or false as assessed from a context $c'$ just in case it is true or false at $c_w$ from every perspective, as in (18) (cf. Lasersohn 2017: 102, ex. 141).

\begin{equation}
\begin{array}{ll}
a. & \Phi \text{ is true as assessed from } c' \text{ iff } \forall p [\Phi(c'_w, p) = true]. \\
b. & \Phi \text{ is false as assessed from } c' \text{ iff } \forall p [\Phi(c'_w, p) = false].
\end{array}
\end{equation}

Then if to believe an r-proposition in $c'$ is just to take it to be true as assessed from $c'$ (as we said for propositions in Section 2), and if the truth of belief reports simply tracks whether the agent believes the embedded r-proposition, then the denotation of think is easy to write, as in (19). This entry has think take an r-proposition and an agent, and return true just in case the agent takes itself to inhabit a world at which the r-proposition is true from all

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\textsuperscript{16}The idea that the objects of attitudes for ‘matters of opinion’ and ‘matters of fact’ are the same is suggested in Lasersohn (2017: 5). If this is so, then it follows from the assumptions mentioned in the text above, and the fact that clausal expressions conveying ‘matters of opinion’ have r-propositions as intensions in a relativist semantics, that all attitudes are directed towards r-propositions according to such a semantics.
perspectives. The resulting belief report with Alfonse as agent, targeting the perspective-idle r-proposition licorice is vegetarian, would come out as in (20).

\[
\text{think}^a_{w,p} = \lambda x. \forall w' \in Dox_{a,w}, p'[\Phi(w', p')]
\]

Thus, Alfonse thinks licorice is vegetarian has the same truth conditions on this semantics as it had on a non-relativist semantics, as in Section 2. It further imposes the exact same descriptive commitments on Alfonse in virtue of his belief, as in (21): by believing this r-proposition, Alfonse limits his doxastic alternatives to include only worlds in which licorice is vegetarian.

\[
\text{desc.comm}(a, w, \lambda (w', p')_s. \text{vegetarian}'(w')(l))
\]

The problem then comes in explicating a notion of belief in an r-proposition that is not idle on the perspective parameter. For these objects, the notion of truth or falsity as assessed from a context given in (18) yields that every such r-proposition is assessed as true or false only if the assessor takes it to be true or false at the world of assessment relative to every perspective. This would imply, for instance, that to assess licorice is tasty as true would be to hold that licorice’s flavor is universally pleasing, to any experiential disposition, which is not right.

In other words, assessors are selective with which perspectives they target in forming beliefs in r-propositions. Speakers competently and sincerely take r-propositions to be true and false, even where they are aware that the world they inhabit is one at which the truth value of the believed r-proposition varies on the perspective parameter. As a result, the relativist must characterize the truth or falsity of r-propositions as assessed from a context using some particular perspectives, and this yields a schema like (17) above, where the challenge is to find an appropriate value for $c'_{p'}$. Unless this is done, it is not clear how to recover the descriptive commitments of believing such an r-proposition, since we will not know what restrictions the belief report imposes on the agent’s doxastic alternatives.

If such r-propositions are assessed only by supplying a value for the perspective of evaluation, this must be reflected in the way belief reports track commitment to their truth: it must be either that (i) ascription of belief in an r-proposition generally is not simpliciter, but relative to a perspective, or (ii) there is a way of defining belief in an r-proposition simpliciter that intrinsically provides a target value for the perspective. We examine both

\[\text{(17)} \text{I don’t consider here the possibility of a robust error theory, on which speakers ordinarily assess such r-propositions as true or false, but do so systematically incompetently. Such a theory is imaginably true, if speakers were somehow systematically unaware of how perspective-dependence works, and behaved as though r-propositions simply were propositions. Given speakers’ general (though imprecise) awareness that the truth of some r-propositions is somehow variable in a way that the truth of others is not, I don’t think such a position is empirically plausible. See Hirvonen (2016) for a defense of such an error-theoretic approach.}\]
these approaches below: the first alternative, introduced by Lasersohn (2005), is considered and rejected in Section 4.1, and the second, introduced by Stephenson (2007), is explicated and adopted in Section 4.2. This will allow us to construct a relativist notion of belief in an r-proposition simpliciter that imposes predictable descriptive comments on agents.

4.1 Parameterizing belief to a perspective

Lasersohn (2005: §6.2) effectively suggests that belief in an r-proposition can only be attributed relative to some perspective or other. Thus, it is incoherent to say that \( x \) thinks \( \Phi \) in \( w \) simpliciter: one must always say that \( x \) thinks \( \Phi \) in \( w \) from \( p \), for some perspective \( p \). The reason for this move is that to believe an r-proposition is to take it to be true, but for Lasersohn, it is not possible to assess an r-proposition as true simpliciter: this must be done from some specific perspective or other (cf. Lasersohn 2005: §6.1). This entails taking a liberal stance on the notion of truth as assessed from a context in (17) above: the context of assessment may contextually determine the relevant perspective, but the assignment of a value to \( c' \) is a fairly free and multi-faceted process, and that value may not coincide with the assessor’s own perspective (cf. Lasersohn 2017: §7.2). But then, since a truth assessment must incorporate some specific perspective, so must a belief report, which reports the result of that assessment: the belief report therefore specifies in its content from which perspective the agent takes the r-proposition to be true.\(^\text{18}\)

And so while a sentence like (22) can report Alfonse as having an ordinary autocentric belief, based on how he takes licorice to be disposed to affect him, with the right extralinguistic context (say, if he’s buying candy for for Bethany, and is opining on what sort she likes), it can also effectively report him as believing exocentrically that licorice is tasty to Bethany, so that Alfonse is reported as assessing the belief for truth from Bethany’s perspective.\(^\text{19}\)

(22) Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty.

A denotation for think must then effectively take a perspective as a covert argument, in order to specify from which perspective an agent believes an r-proposition. Such a denotation is as follows, adapting the treatment in Lasersohn (2005: 676, ex. 35) to the present system and notation, where ‘\( p' \)’ is a variable over perspectives (individual-world pairs).

(23) \[
[\text{think}]^{w,p} = \lambda \Phi_{st} \lambda p'. \lambda x.e. \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_x,w[\Phi(w',p')]
\]

Autocentric belief reports, which are perhaps pragmatically privileged defaults, are then just reports of beliefs from the agent’s own perspective, such that \( x \) believes \( \Phi \) autocentrically

\(^{18}\)This reasoning is spelled out explicitly in Lasersohn (2005: 675): “To believe something is to consider it true. That is, belief involves some kind of assessment for truth – and this requires specifying a judge. We have just seen that one may adopt an autocentric, exocentric, or acentric perspective toward a sentence content […] It is natural to suspect, then, that the context assumed by an individual in assessing a sentence content will have some effect on whether he or she believes it [and hence an effect on whether the corresponding belief report is true – P. M.].”

\(^{19}\)It’s quite difficult to get this exocentric reading of (22), without a rich extralinguistic context, a fact for which I don’t think anyone has a good explanation. It helps to make the subject of predication specific, and to use a perfective reading, such that after Alfonse witnesses Bethany eat the licorice, Alfonse thinks the licorice was tasty can more easily anchor Alfonse’s belief to Bethany’s perspective.
at $w$ just in case $x$ believes $\Phi$ at $w$ from $\langle x, w \rangle$. Suppose then that Alfonse believes at $w$ that licorice is tasty autocentrically, while Bethany believes at $w$ that licorice is not tasty autocentrically, and that both these beliefs accurately reflect their respective tastes. The reports of these beliefs using $\text{think}$ then come out as in (25), assuming that $\text{not}$ denotes standard predicate negation as in (24).

\begin{equation}
\text{not}^{w,p} = \lambda P_{e}. \lambda x_{e}. \neg P(x)
\end{equation}

\begin{align}
\text{(25)} & \quad \text{a. [Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty]}^{w,p} \\
& = [\text{think}^{w,p}(\lambda \langle w', p' \rangle_{s}. \text{licorice is tasty})^{w',p'}(a, w)](\text{[Alfonse]}^{w,p}) \\
& = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{a,w}[\text{tasty}''(w')(a, w)(l)] \\
\text{b. [Bethany thinks licorice is not tasty]}^{c,w,p} \\
& = [\text{think}^{w,p}(\lambda \langle w', p' \rangle_{s}. \text{not})^{w',p'}(\text{[licorice is tasty})^{w',p'})(b, w)](\text{[Bethany]}^{w,p}) \\
& = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{b,w}[\neg \text{tasty}''(w')(b, w)(l)]
\end{align}

This is just the sort of situation in which the relativist wants to say that Alfonse and Bethany faultlessly disagree: given what we said in Section 1, this should mean that while their beliefs are descriptively compatible (and even mutually descriptively correct, so long as they are not mistaken about their own tastes), they are not doxastically compatible. According to this semantics, the first condition is met, but the second is not.

We see that Alfonse’s and Bethany’s beliefs are descriptively compatible, since in virtue of holding these beliefs, Alfonse only commits descriptively to licorice being tasty from his perspective, while Bethany only commits to licorice not being tasty from hers, and these can be mutually true at a world. Their beliefs in the respective r-propositions, each from their own perspective, determine a set of worlds compatible with those beliefs, and therefore a set of descriptive commitments, as follows.

\begin{equation}
\text{desc.comm}(a, w, \lambda \langle w', p' \rangle_{s}. \text{tasty}''(w')(a, w)(l)) = \{w' : \text{tasty}''(w')(a, w)(l)\}
\end{equation}

\begin{equation}
\text{desc.comm}(b, w, \lambda \langle w', p' \rangle_{s}. \neg \text{tasty}''(w')(b, w)(l)) = \{w' : \neg \text{tasty}''(w')(b, w)(l)\}
\end{equation}

But Alfonse and Bethany’s doxastic states are therefore compatible, as far as these descriptive commitments are concerned. This is because their beliefs are relativized to a perspective, and so there is no reason that the same agent cannot coherently believe that licorice is tasty from Alfonse’s perspective, and that it is not tasty from Bethany’s. In fact, so long as Alfonse and Bethany are mutually aware of each other’s tastes, they do actually each believe both of these things simultaneously, with no descriptive incoherency at all (cf. Lasersohn 2005: 676-677; Lasersohn 2017: 156-157 on the coherency of distinct ‘bodies’ of belief). Supposing Alfonse believes both these things at $w$, the conditions in (27) hold, and so Alfonse’s descriptive commitments in virtue of holding both these beliefs simultaneously are as in (28).

\begin{align}
\text{(27)} & \quad \text{a. } \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{a,w}[\text{tasty}''(w')(a, w)(l)] \\
& \quad \text{b. } \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{a,w}[\neg \text{tasty}''(w')(b, w)(l)] \\
\text{(28)} & \quad \{w' : \text{tasty}''(w')(a, w) \land \neg \text{tasty}''(w')(b, w)\}
\end{align}
(28) is a nonempty set, so Alfonse’s descriptive commitments in virtue of holding these beliefs coherently describe some set of worlds; and insofar as \( w \) is among these worlds, his beliefs are mutually descriptively correct. There is thus no descriptive conflict with Alfonse adopting Bethany’s belief that licorice is not tasty, while maintaining his own belief that licorice is tasty, and the beliefs are not doxastically incompatible.

This is an odd position for the relativist to be in. The semantics is supposedly engineered to construct some notion of disagreement with respect to autocentrically-assessed perspective-dependent contents in cases just like this, where one agent likes the taste of licorice and the other does not. But by the criterion of doxastic incompatibility, it delivers no such thing: in fact, precisely where the relativist wants to say that Alfonse and Bethany disagree, there is not only no doxastic incompatibility between their beliefs, but they can both very well believe the exact same things, and so there is no sense in which their beliefs even differ, let alone descriptively conflict.\(^{20}\)

We therefore abandon this approach to belief reports, since it fails to deliver one of the primary notions of disagreement with which we’re concerned. What we need in order to secure the relevant notion of differing beliefs, and so the relevant notion of doxastic incompatibility, is a notion of belief in an r-proposition not from some specific perspective, but simpliciter.\(^{21}\)

### 4.2 Belief simpliciter as autocentric

Stephenson (2007: 500-501) offers a relativist semantics for think, according to which to believe an r-proposition simpliciter is to believe it autocentrically, which is just to take it to be true from one’s own perspective. This notion of belief is de se with respect to the perspective parameter: in believing an r-proposition, the believer restricts the set of perspectives it entertains as candidates for its own. Since we treat perspectives as individual-world pairs, this amounts to restricting the set of world-bound individual that the believer takes as candidates for its actual self.

Stephenson thus effectively provides a simple answer to the question of how to set the value for the contextually relevant perspective \( c'_{w} \) in truth assessment: it is always the assessor’s own actual perspective that is aimed at, so that in effect all truth assessment is autocentric, as follows (cf. Stephenson 2007: 522-523).\(^{22}\)

\(^{20}\)Something like this observation seems to lie behind criticisms of relativist semantics’ treatment of faultless disagreement, e.g. in Stojanovic (2007: §3) and Wolf (2016: §2.1.1), though these criticisms are vague and cursory, and so hard to evaluate. Lasersohn (2017: §8.6) does eventually construct a notion pertaining to speakers’ de se ‘auto-bodies’ of belief, which may produce the desired doxastic conflict in virtue of conflicting autocentric beliefs. However, this does not align with Lasersohn’s treatment of attitude reports, whose truth conditions make no reference to the auto-body, and so the account as it stands is incomplete.

\(^{21}\)Lasersohn does eventually offer a notion of belief in an r-proposition simpliciter, but strangely does so by existentially quantifying over perspectives, resulting in a denotation like the following (cf. Lasersohn 2017: 156, ex. 188):

\[
J_{\text{think}}^{w,p} = \lambda \Phi_{st} \lambda x. \exists p' [\forall w' \in D_{w,w}[\Phi(w', p')]]
\]

This does provide a notion of belief without relativizing to a perspective in the content, but the truth conditions are not only trivial and implausible (they entail that to think \( \Phi \) is just to take it to be true with respect to some perspective or other), but will not capture faultless disagreement in the desired way either.

\(^{22}\)Note that the world of the context of assessment \( c'_{w} \) does double-duty in this definition. The difference
agent Alfonse undertakes as a result of this belief. It also allows a notion of belief simpliciter.

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track of modal evaluations of perspective-dependent claims (cf. MacFarlane 2014: 7.2.11).

Stephenson’s (ibid.: 501) spells out the autocentric semantics for think as follows, using a notion of centered doxastic alternatives that effectively include candidates for the perspective, as opposed to candidates for the world, that the agent inhabits.

\[ \text{Dox}_{x,w} := \{ \langle y, w' \rangle : w, x \text{ entertains the possibility that it is } y \text{ in } w' \} \]

Going forward, we’ll simplify this denotation to be truer to the schema in (29), by appealing directly the the agent’s own perspective in an ordinary, uncentered set of doxastic alternatives. In other words, think will intrinsically encode a self-directed de re belief that picks out the agent’s own perspective in the relevant doxastic alternatives, as follows.\(^{23}\)

\[ [\text{think}]^{w,p} = \lambda \Phi_{st}. \lambda x. \forall (y, w') \in \text{Dox}_{x,w}[\Phi(w', \langle y, w' \rangle)] \]

And so for instance, to say that Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty is to say that Alfonse takes the flavor of licorice in the world he inhabits to be disposed to produce gustatory pleasure according to his own experiential dispositions at that world.

\[ [\text{Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty}]^{w,p} = [\text{think}]^{w,p}(\lambda (w', p)'s. [\text{licorice is tasty}]^{w', pd'}([\text{Alfonse}]^{w,p}) \]

As we’ll see in Section 5, this produces a coherent set of descriptive commitments that the agent Alfonse undertakes as a result of this belief. It also allows a notion of belief simpliciter in the r-proposition that licorice is tasty: unlike the approach in Section 4.1, we do not need to say to which perspective his belief is parameterized in the content of the belief report, because belief itself just is autocentric belief. Therefore in making the reports in (33), we portray Alfonse and Bethany as believing and disbelieving the very same thing: Alfonse takes the r-proposition that licorice is tasty to be true simpliciter, while Bethany takes it to be false simpliciter. We therefore can precisely describe the way in which these beliefs are doxastically incompatible.

\(^{23}\)Stephenson’s de se approach has a deep affinity with the treatment of belief as self-ascription of properties, stemming from Lewis (1979); cf. Egan (2010) for a similar treatment of ‘taste’ predicates. Whether and how to appeal to the de se in these sorts of constructions is a difficult question that I can’t do justice to here. But I’ll note that Stephenson’s specific approach has some strange consequences for belief reports: for instance, it predicts that if Alfonse mistakenly thinks he’s Bethany in \(w\), such that \(\forall (y, w') \in \text{Dox}_{a,w}[y = b]\), then in believing that licorice is tasty in \(w\), Alfonse will commit only to Bethany being disposed to like the taste of licorice, and not commit to himself being so disposed. This strikes me as a bizarre result, since Alfonse is in some sense mistaken about licorice’s flavor in thinking it’s tasty so long as he doesn’t like it, regardless of whether he thinks he’s someone else. Using de re attitudes raises the old problems of error through misidentification of oneself (cf. Stephenson 2007: 501, fn. 15; Lasersohn 2017: 190): but I take this to be a separate issue from those addressed here, and one that I’m not convinced a Stephensonian treatment solves anyway. Self-directed de re attitudes can be achieved on a Stephensonian system by making the additional assumption that agents know who they are.
(33)  a. Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty.
    b. Bethany thinks licorice is not tasty.

It’s worth noting that this treatment of belief as intrinsically autocentric is not an innovation of the relativist semantics per se. The traditional treatment of belief on a non-relativist semantics as in Section 2 already targets the world that the agent inhabits, and therefore takes truth assessment to be intrinsically an assessment of one’s own situation. The only innovation that the relativist provides on this front is the introduction of the perspective parameter to the schema in (17), which means simply that agents believe by assessing their own situation in a more complex way. Note also that all the dimensions of these assessments are equally ‘objective:’ there is a fact of the matter about which perspective an assessor inhabits, just as there is a fact of the matter about which world it inhabits. And so there is a well-defined sense in which a relativist semantics does not really pertain to things about which there is ‘no fact of the matter.’ Rather, it just complicates the way in which speakers are sensitive to facts of the matter in forming beliefs: in the case of tasty, this means being sensitive to their own experiential dispositions in a certain way.

Before demonstrating how this treatment of belief can derive the notion of faultless disagreement we asked for in Section 1, it is worth briefly clarifying a potential worry: if belief is intrinsically autocentric, how is it possible to believe exocentrically? Recall from Section 4.1 that Lasersohn’s motivation for treating truth assessment, and therefore belief reports, as not intrinsically autocentric was precisely because of the possibility of exocentrically assessing ‘matters of opinion,’ and reporting this exocentric assessment in belief reports. Do we not lose this expressive power by adopting the Stephensonian notion of belief simpliciter?

As it turns out, no expressive power is lost in principle by making this move, because to believe an r-proposition Φ exocentrically from p is identical to believing a related r-proposition Φ’ autocentrically, where Φ’ is obtained by altering Φ by anchoring it to p. That is to say, the notion of exocentric belief from any particular perspective is systematically recoverable from the notion of belief simpliciter.24 In short, to believe from ⟨x, w⟩ exocentrically that licorice is tasty is the very same thing as to believe autocentrically that licorice is tasty from ⟨x, w⟩. To see this, recall the Lasersohnian denotation of think from Section 4.1 above, repeated from (23) here.

\[
(34) \text{[think]}^{w\cdot p} = \lambda\Phi.s.\lambda p'.\lambda x.e.\forall w' \in Dox_{x,w}[\Phi(w', p')]
\]

The truth conditions of an exocentric belief report anchored to p’ are then as follows, for any r-proposition Φ, exocentric perspective p’, and agent x.

\[
(35) \text{[think]}^{w\cdot p}(\Phi)(p')(x) = \forall w' \in Dox_{x,w}[\Phi(w', p')]
\]

24 The reverse is not true: one cannot recover the notion of belief simpliciter from the notion of exocentric belief from a particular perspective. Insofar as a contextualist (or Lasersohnian) semantics lacks this notion, but can only make sense of beliefs targeted at objects that are effectively intrinsically anchored to some perspective or other, this also means that a contextualist semantics is strictly less expressive than a relativist semantics in its belief reports. That is to say, the relativist can in principle capture every possible contextualist reading of any sentence, while the reverse is not true (pace Stojanovic 2007), since the contextualist in principle lacks access to any reading of belief reports targeted at perspective-neutral contents (and if this were added, contextualism would effectively collapse into relativism).
Suppose now that we have a semantic operator \( \pi \), which operates on an r-proposition and anchors it to \( p' \), as follows.

\[
[\pi]^{w,p} = \lambda \Phi_{st}. \Phi(w,p')
\]

It can then be shown that the Stephenson-inspired belief report, embedding a clause whose content has been anchored to \( p' \) using \( \pi \), has the same truth conditions as the Laser-sohnian exocentric report in (35), which instead embeds the perspective-neutral clause and takes \( p' \) as a silent argument. Repeating the denotation of \( \text{think} \) from (31):

\[
[\text{think}]^{w,p} = \lambda \Phi_{st}. \lambda x. \forall w' \in Dox_{x,w}[\Phi(w', \langle x, w' \rangle)]
\]

\[
[\text{think}]^{w,p}(\lambda\langle w', p'' \rangle_s. [\pi]^{w,p}(\Phi))(x) = [\text{think}]^{w,p}(\lambda\langle w', p'' \rangle_s. \Phi(w', p'))(x) = \forall w' \in Dox_{x,w}[\Phi(w', p')]
\]

The truth conditions in (38) are identical to those in (35), and since this was done for an arbitrary perspective, any exocentric belief is in principle expressible using the denotation in (37), provided that the content of the embedded clause is anchored to the right perspective. To take a concrete example, to believe autocentrically that licorice is tasty to Alfonse is roughly the same as to believe from Alfonse’s perspective that licorice is tasty.\(^{25}\) So long as the semantic content of a lower clause can be anchored to Alfonse’s perspective in some way, all such exocentric reports are generable on a Stephensonian semantics.

It is of course another question what natural language operator if any serves the function that \( \pi \) does here: the relativist owes us an account of how the content of the embedded clause becomes anchored to a particular perspective. Stephenson (2007) holds that this happens as the result of the perspective-dependent predicate taking a silent internal argument, while MacFarlane (2014: §7.2.6) holds that the use of the embedded clause with no overt material signaling an exocentric perspective is simply loose talk for what would be expressed by a corresponding clause with overt material. Whether these are plausible suggestions can only be seen by a careful study of where and how exocentricity triggers, in belief reports and outside of them.\(^{26}\) For now, we turn to the descriptive commitments incurred by agents in virtue of holding autocentric beliefs directed at r-propositions.

### 5 Descriptive commitments and faultless disagreement

Relativists have often implied that there are certain semantic contents that, in virtue of being perspective-dependent, deal with things about which there is ‘no fact of the matter,’

\(^{25}\)Roughly, because the to-phrase in *tasty to Alfonse* does slightly more than anchor the r-proposition to a perspective: it also enforces presuppositions of direct experience, to the effect that Alfonse has actually tasted licorice, so that the merely dispositional reading of *tasty* disappears. This is in general an issue with accounts of exocentricity, in that exocentric reports seem to require such experiential presuppositions, while non-exocentric reports don’t, and an account of exocentricity that merely shifts the perspective parameter doesn’t explain this. I won’t address this here, since it’s a general feature of our inadequate treatments of the phenomenon: see also fn. 26.

\(^{26}\)I am persuaded that the current treatments of exocentricity are not adequate, and that the phenomenon is a far more difficult and grammatically regular one than has been previously suggested, and in particular that it interacts with the argument structure of predicates and verbal aspect in complex ways. I leave these issues to the side, as the present work only intends to make a point about autocentric attitude reports.
and that the point of a relativist semantics is largely to faithfully render these contents. This is misleading, in a sense. Belief in r-propositions is not much different from belief in propositions, in that both incur predictable, ‘objective’ descriptive commitments upon the believer. But it’s also right, in a sense. Belief in r-propositions does not necessarily incur the same descriptive commitments across agents, as belief in propositions does, leading to the impression that perspective-sensitive r-propositions don’t track any one set of ‘objective’ affairs across the speaker population. It’s necessary to make all this plain, in order to show exactly how a relativist semantics allows for the possibility of a certain kind of ‘faultless disagreement.’

Section 5.1 explains how belief in r-propositions is in some sense akin to, and in some sense different from, belief in propositions. Section 5.2 then demonstrates how these combined features allow us to characterize a notion of descriptively faultless disagreement.

5.1 Descriptive commitments of relativist attitudes

In Section 2, we saw that the descriptive commitments of a proposition can be recovered by taking the set of worlds that remain compatible with the belief state of an agent in virtue of believing that proposition. The descriptive commitments that an agent incurs by believing an r-proposition can be recovered in an analogous way, since in virtue of holding such a belief, an agent likewise places limits on its belief state, with respect to the worlds it takes to be live candidates for the world it inhabits.

The exact characterization of descriptive commitments has to be modified slightly for r-propositions, but the notion is the same: the descriptive commitments that x incurs by believing Φ in w are represented by the set of worlds that x restricts its doxastic alternatives to, in virtue of holding such a belief. Since such a belief aims at the perspective of x in the relevant alternatives, this amounts to saying that the descriptive commitments are represented by the set of worlds w′ that verify Φ from w′ and ⟨x, w′⟩.

(39) \[ \text{desc.comm}(x, w, \Phi) = \{w' : \Phi(w', \langle x, w' \rangle)\} \]

To see that this is right, we can also look at the truth conditions of a belief report. Recall that where x believes Φ in w, we have:

(40) \[ [\text{think}^w_p(\Phi)](x) = \forall w' \in Dox_{x,w}[\Phi(w', \langle x, w' \rangle)] \]

But then, we get the condition in (39) just from taking the set of worlds that satisfy the condition within brackets in (40) set by the agent’s doxastic alternatives: and this is the exact same state of affairs as we saw with descriptive commitments on ordinary propositions in Section 2. And so in virtue of believing an r-proposition, an agent restricts the candidates for the world it inhabits to only those worlds that verify the r-proposition from its own perspective. This means to believe an r-proposition is to take the world to be a certain way.

To see how this works in practice, we can first illustrate that for any r-proposition idle on the perspective parameter at all worlds, the descriptive commitments incurred by the agent are the same as those incurred when believing the corresponding proposition on a non-relativist semantics. For example, the intension of licorice is vegetarian is as in (41) on the
present semantics. Plugging this into (39), we see that since the perspective parameter serves no non-trivial function for this intension, an agent that believes this r-proposition simply restricts its doxastic alternatives to those worlds in which licorice is vegetarian, and these are the same conditions given in (10) in Section 2. Note also that it still makes no difference who believes this proposition, or in what circumstances: the descriptive commitments are again always the same.

\[
\lambda(w, p)_s.\text{vegetarian}^\prime(w)(l)
\]

\[
\text{desc.comm}(x, w, \lambda(w, p)_s.\text{vegetarian}^\prime(w)(l))
\]

\[
= \{w' : [\lambda(w, p)_s.\text{vegetarian}^\prime(w)(l)](w', \langle x, w' \rangle)\}
\]

Now to take an example where the perspective parameter plays its crucial role: recall the intension of \textit{licorice is tasty} (43). The descriptive commitments of believing this are as in (44).

\[
\lambda(w, p)_s.\text{tasty}''(w)(p)(l)
\]

\[
\text{desc.comm}(x, w, \lambda(w, p)_s.\text{tasty}''(w)(p)(l))
\]

\[
= \{w' : [\lambda(w, p)_s.\text{tasty}''(w)(p)(l)](w', \langle x, w' \rangle)\}
\]

That is, where an agent believes that licorice is tasty, it limits the worlds it takes as live candidates for the world it inhabits to those worlds in which the flavor of licorice is disposed to please themselves. Since the judge of the perspective parameter is not idle here, the descriptive commitments depend on it: this means, crucially, that different agents can incur different descriptive commitments in believing this r-proposition. This will be illustrated with an example below.

It’s important to emphasize that the descriptive commitments one incurs by believing an r-proposition may be wrong, for the ordinary reason that the world may not be the way one commits to it being in taking on the belief. That is to say, the world of belief may not be included in the set of worlds constituting the descriptive commitments for that belief. We therefore have a well-defined notion of making a descriptive error in believing an r-proposition, which generalizes across all cases, regardless of whether or how the r-proposition varies on the perspective parameter:

\[
\text{If } x \text{ believes } \Phi \text{ in } w, \text{ then } x \text{ commits a descriptive error in doing so iff:}
\]

\[
w \not\in \text{desc.comm}(x, w, \Phi).
\]

As an illustration of how such an error might arise for a relevantly perspective-dependent r-proposition, suppose that Alfonse believes licorice is tasty in \(w\). Then the descriptive conditions Alfonse incurs in virtue of believing that licorice is tasty are as follows.

\[
\text{[Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty]}^w_p
\]

\[
= \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_a, w [\text{tasty}''(w')(a, w')(l)]
\]
That is, in believing that licorice is tasty, Alfonse commits to the world being a certain way: it must be that the flavor of licorice is disposed to please any individual who has his own experiential dispositions. In other words, Alfonse’s ‘objective’ commitments are such that whatever licorice is like, and whatever his own experiential dispositions are, it must be as a matter of fact that he is disposed to enjoy licorice’s flavor. This is a purely descriptive commitment, as shown by the fact that it is represented in (47) only by a set of worlds.

Now in these circumstances, Alfonse may commit a descriptive error according to the definition in (45) in thinking licorice is tasty autocentrically, if he is mistaken about what the flavor of licorice is, or his own tastes, or both in some combination: supposing he believes that licorice is tasty, but finds to his disappointment on trying it that he doesn’t like its flavor (48a), then his earlier belief was mistaken in this sense, and the world of belief is not in the set making up the descriptive commitments of the belief (48b).

Again, there is a substantive sense in which autocentrically thinking licorice is tasty is not a ‘matter of opinion’: one can be mistaken in doing so, in the ordinary way, by taking the world to be some way that it isn’t. And further, since one typically cannot control one’s own tastes, it is not typically ‘up to’ the believing agent what it is licensed to believe on descriptive grounds. Finally, since an agent has no guarantee to being right about the flavors of things or its own experiential dispositions, the agent is not even especially guarded from error in holding such beliefs.

That a relativist semantics entails the possibility of error even in ‘matters of opinion’ has sometimes been alluded to (e.g. in Kölbl 2009: 383, fn. 12; Lasersohn 2017: 93-94). It runs counter to semantic treatments like that in Coppock (2018), which hard-codes a notion of ‘faultlessness’ into the grammar by making predicates like *tasty* intrinsically ‘discreationary.’ As Coppock’s puts it, regarding sentences expressing ‘discretionary’ contents (ibid. 136): “So no agent could ever be at fault for expressing one of these sentences.” There is some

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27I say ‘mistaken in this sense,’ because it might be misleading to say his belief that licorice is tasty is just wrong, or false: to do so might give the impression that I think licorice isn’t tasty, which isn’t the point. For this reason, truth ascriptions with perspective-dependent contents are subtle, and depending on the context it may or may not be appropriate to ascribe truth or falsity to them simpliciter in a way that patterns with descriptive commitments of agents. Where the belief report is read exocentrically, and as anchoring to Alfonse’s perspective in its content, then the ascription of falsity is easier: Alfonse thought licorice was tasty (that is, to him), but he was just wrong.

28This last fact has been obscured in the literature, and in fact relativists have often seemed to imply the opposite: for example, Lasersohn (2005: 655) speaks of an agent’s ‘epistemic privilege’ with respect to predicates of personal taste. The reason for this seems to be that authors have focused on cases where the agent has already experienced the stimulus in question (e.g., tasted licorice, to see whether it’s tasty). While tasting indeed often gives us good information both about something’s flavor and whether we like that flavor, we actually taste only a small proportion of things, and this state of affairs is no different from any other non-‘taste’ predicates that we can determine the applicability of by ordinary observation. There seems to be no interesting sense, therefore, in which we are privileged or guarded from error in such matters.
preliminary evidence suggesting that this error-invincible approach is mistaken, and the relativist semantics is right to encode a notion of descriptive error in these matters. As Kneer (unpublished m.s. §4, ‘Predicates of personal taste: Empirical data’) shows, when subjects are asked to assess speakers’ personal taste claims, and those speakers judge autocentrically in a way that misdescribes their own experiences, the subjects are inclined judge what speakers say to be false, and so they are apparently sensitive to these self-oriented descriptive commitments. Note also that here a relativist semantics does not need to stipulate a new notion of ‘fault’ or lack of fault: the ordinary notion of making or not making a descriptive mistake suffices.

Belief in r-propositions is therefore much like belief in propositions: in virtue of taking on such a belief, an agent incurs certain descriptive commitments, and these can be correct or mistaken. There is therefore no interesting sense in which (pace e.g. Kneer 2020) r-propositions, as perspective-neutral objects, are ‘incomplete’ or somehow too impoverished to provide us with the ordinary cognitive commitments attending belief in propositions. It is true that, in order to make sense of the descriptive commitments attending belief in perspective-neutral r-propositions, we must take belief simpliciter to be evaluated with respect to one’s own perspective. But this is not a structural innovation: we already had to take belief simpliciter to be evaluated with respect to one’s own world, since propositions are world-neutral objects. As before, all the relativist has done is add a parameter, while the rest remains the same and the effects of belief fall out automatically.

But as noted above, there is an important sense in which r-propositions do differ from propositions as objects of belief: because they are richer objects, evaluated with respect to both a world and perspective, it is possible for the same r-proposition to incur different descriptive commitments, depending on who the believer is. Suppose now that Bethany believes in w that licorice is tasty (49). The descriptive commitments she incurs in virtue of holding this belief are as in (50).

\[
(49) \quad [\text{Bethany thinks licorice is tasty}]^{w,p} = \forall w' \in Dox_{b,w} [\text{tasty}''(w')(b,w')(l)]
\]

\[
(50) \quad \text{desc.comm}(b, w, \lambda(w', p')_s, \text{tasty}''(w')(p')(l)) = \{ w' : \lambda(w', p')_s, \text{tasty}''(w')(p')(l)|(w', (b, w')) \}
\]

In other words, in believing that licorice is tasty in w, Bethany takes the world to be such that the flavor of licorice is disposed to please her (not Alfonse). The sets of worlds in (47) and (50) are not identical, and hence on this relativist semantics, the identity of an object of belief and the descriptive commitments incurred by believing it pattern apart. While Alfonse and Bethany believe the exact same thing, they incur different descriptive commitments in...

\[29\] There are subtle questions here that pertain to what exactly subjects are targeting when they deem such a mistaken claim ‘false:’ a contextualist will say that this judgment targets the propositional content expressed, while the relativist will say that it targets the descriptive commitments imposed in virtue of the belief. The relativist, it would seem, allows for a way to evaluate the claim as in some sense wrong, and also in some sense right, if the speaker makes a descriptive error, but the subject nevertheless believes what the speaker said based on their own experiences. I suspect this is an advantage, and that speaker judgments subtly navigate multiple parameters in this way when judging taste claims, but that is for now just a hunch.

23
doing so. As we’ll see, it’s this fact that allows for a coherent characterization of descriptive faultless disagreement.

5.2 A substantive notion of faultless disagreement

It’s now possible to show how the relativist semantics of belief allows for a substantive and coherent notion of faultless disagreement, in the terms set forth in Section 1: it is possible for two agents to have belief commitments that are (i) doxastically incompatible, in that a single agent could not take them on simultaneously without representing the world in an incoherent way; and (ii) descriptively compatible, in that a single world can verify the descriptive commitments of both beliefs, as believed by distinct agents.

To begin, we provide an updated notion of doxastic incompatibility for r-propositions. The notion is the same as that given in (11) in Section 2 for propositions: two r-propositions are doxastically incompatible just in case no agent in any world can believe both without emptying its doxastic alternatives, and so representing the world incoherently.

\[(51) \Phi \text{ and } \Psi \text{ are doxastically incompatible iff: } \neg \exists x, w [\forall w' \in Dox_{x,w} [\Phi(w', \langle x, w' \rangle) \land \Psi(w', \langle x, w' \rangle) ] \land Dox_{x,w} \neq \emptyset] \]

It’s important to note that this notion of doxastic incompatibility remains cast purely in terms of worlds, and therefore in terms of descriptive commitments: the incoherence of the resulting belief is factual, and we do not need to invoke some new notion of compatibility stipulated for a relativist semantics in terms of non-world parameters to secure the disagreement results.\(^{30}\)

From this we see that the belief that licorice is tasty and the belief that licorice is not tasty are not doxastically compatible. Take any agent \(x\) that believes both in \(w\) (52a). It follows, since there is no world \(w'\) that satisfies both these conditions imposed on \(x\)’s doxastic alternatives, that \(x\)’s set of doxastic alternatives in \(w\) is empty (52b).

\[(52) \begin{align*}
a. & \quad \forall w' \in Dox_{x,w} [tasty''(w')(x, w')(l) \land \neg tasty''(w')(x, w')(l)] \\
b. & \quad Dox_{x,w} = \emptyset \end{align*} \]

That is, in virtue of believing both that licorice is tasty and that licorice is not tasty, \(x\) represents the world incoherently, by attributing contradictory perspective-neutral properties to licorice. In this case, the properties are those of both being disposed, and not being disposed, to gustatorily please \(x\). The flavor of licorice cannot, as a matter of fact, be this way.

Next, we need a notion of not making a descriptive error in virtue of believing an r-proposition: but this is just the counterpart notion of making such an error, from (45) in Section 5.1. That is, an agent makes no descriptive error in believing an r-proposition just in

\(^{30}\)And so Lasersohn’s (2005: 683-684) answer to what the ‘substance of disagreement’ is over ‘matters of opinion,’ where he says, ‘I think the only answer one can give to this is that the two sentences cannot both be accommodated into a single coherent perspective,’ is too weak: it is not just that no perspective (or world-perspective pair) can verify both r-propositions, but rather than in virtue of the way belief relates to perspective, it is not possible to believe both r-propositions descriptively coherently at all (and \textit{a fortiori} not possible to do so without making a descriptive error).
case the world of belief is among the set of worlds constituting the descriptive commitments incurred in holding that belief. That is, the world really is the way the belief represents it as being.

(53) If \( x \) believes \( \Phi \) in \( w \), then \( x \) commits no descriptive error in doing so iff:

\[ w \in \text{desc.comm}(x, w, \Phi). \]

Finally, we’re in a position to offer a definition of descriptively faultless disagreement in terms of r-propositions, as follows.

(54) If in \( w \), \( x \) believes \( \Phi \) and \( y \) believes \( \Psi \), then \( x \) and \( y \) descriptively faultlessly disagree in doing so iff:

a. \( \Phi \) and \( \Psi \) are doxastically incompatible;
b. \( x \) commits no descriptive error in believing \( \Phi \);
c. \( y \) commits no descriptive error in believing \( \Psi \).

To illustrate, we can return to Alfonse and Bethany. Suppose that in \( w \), both have tasted licorice, that Alfonse likes its taste while Bethany does not, and that the belief statements in (55) correctly report their resulting opinions.

(55) a. Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty.
   b. Bethany thinks licorice is not tasty.

As shown above, their respective beliefs (that licorice is tasty and that licorice is not tasty) are doxastically incompatible: neither can adopt the belief of the other and represent the world in a coherent way. But neither makes a descriptive error in their beliefs, because the descriptive commitments they incur in virtue of holding these beliefs both correctly describe the world. Since only Alfonse likes the taste of licorice, the world is as in (56); the truth conditions for the belief reports in (55a) and (55b) are as in (57a) and (57b), respectively; the corresponding descriptive commitments hold of \( w \) (58).

(56) \( \text{tasty}''(w)(a, w)(l) \land \neg \text{tasty}''(w)(b, w)(l) \)

(57) a. \( \lceil \text{Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty} \rceil^{w,p} = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{a, w} [\text{tasty}''(w')(a, w')(l)] \)
   b. \( \lceil \text{Bethany thinks licorice is not tasty} \rceil^{w,p} = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{b, w} [\neg \text{tasty}''(w')(b, w')(l)] \)

(58) a. \( w \in \{ w' : \text{tasty}''(w')(a, w')(l) \} \)
   b. \( w \in \{ w' : \neg \text{tasty}''(w')(b, w')(l) \} \)

That’s it, then: they hold beliefs that mutually represent the world incoherently, but that taken in isolation and believed by distinct agents can represent it not only coherently, but mutually correctly. And this is because r-propositions, as objects of belief, impose descriptive
commitments only relative to a particular agent, meaning that Alfonse and Bethany can persist in disagreement, even if they think all the same things about the way the world is.31

There are three things worth noting about this characterization of descriptively faultless disagreement. First, it says nothing about any sort of ‘faultlessness’ characterized in other terms. Disagreements might put one of the disagreeing parties at fault for any number of reasons that don’t entail a descriptive error: in virtue of disagreeing, an agent might have bad taste, do something morally wrong, be impolite, judge too rashly or on insufficient evidence, and so on. As hinted at in Section 1, the wider notion of ‘fault,’ or of ‘making an error,’ is too broad to be addressed directly by these specific semantic concerns.

The same goes for the notion of a ‘real’ or ‘substantive’ disagreement – whether a disagreement has substance is orthogonal to the question of whether it commits one of the parties to a descriptive error, since there are nonfactual disputes that lead people to finding fault with each other (see Anthony 2016: §3 for some discussion on this point), and factual disputes that don’t, because they don’t matter. With predicates like tasty, which tend to be ‘low-pressure’ in Sundell’s (2016) terminology, these matters tend to be conflated, because licensing of descriptively faultless disagreement and letting each agent be entitled to their own opinion often pattern together – but this is not always the case.

Second, descriptively faultless disagreement has no special theoretical status: its possibility is just a consequence of the way the basic machinery surrounding belief works, and particularly of the fact that belief is sensitive to the way the believer is constituted. Once this basic machinery is set up, this sort of disagreement needs no special explanation or justification, and its existence isn’t surprising or problematic. That same machinery allows for a panoply of other quirks that for whatever reason semanticists have not much bothered with. For example, it allows for cases of ‘descriptively faulty agreement,’ e.g. where two agents both believe something is tasty, but only one of them makes a descriptive error in doing so (homework assignment: how?). The focus on faultless disagreement in particular is therefore a historical accident.

Thinking about descriptively faultless disagreement in this way may also dispel some of the anxiety relativists have professed (e.g. in MacFarlane 2007: §6) over what the ‘point’ is of the sort of disagreement expressions like tasty engender. While there may be nothing wrong with their specific suggestions as to the uses to which these expressions are actually put, the frank answer is: it’s just a feature that’s entailed by the way a much broader mechanism works, and speakers can do whatever they want with it.32

31 At this point, one might protest: but on the present account, if Alfonse and Bethany are mutually informed about each other’s tastes and so on, then there is no relevant proposition that one agent believes but the other disbelieves – so do they ‘really’ disagree? But recall that propositions are not the objects of belief in this framework; r-propositions are. Of course, it may be that speakers are sensitive to different sorts of disagreement, including the distinction between disagreements that impose descriptive error and those that don’t; but these are equally disagreements, on the folk notion being explicated here.

32 I am in general skeptical of demands for functional explanations of what the ‘point’ of some complex linguistic phenomenon is. Certainly there are things speakers can do with expressions over whose application they can descriptively faultlessly disagree, that they could not do otherwise, and descriptively faultless disagreement may come to take on many functional roles. But the phenomenon itself is the outcome of so many interacting factors that I doubt it has any ‘point’ in its own right. These discussions seem to me to bring in dubious theoretical prejudices regarding the way conversation and belief ‘ought’ to work, with the demand that any deviation from this theoretical ideal be justified (and so Glanzberg 2007: 16 notes that
Third, the possibility of descriptively faultless disagreement over r-propositions denoted by certain expressions is not predictable from the semantics of those expressions alone. It is true that the perspective-sensitivity of tasty is a necessary condition for securing the possibility of the sort of disagreement described for Alfonse and Bethany above, but it is not sufficient – it also requires that Alfonse and Bethany have distinct experiential dispositions where it comes to the taste of licorice. If they had the exact same tastes regarding licorice in \( w \), such that \( \text{tasty}''(w)(a,w)(l) = \text{tasty}''(w)(b,w)(l) \), then they could not faultlessly disagree in this way in \( w \), as the reader can confirm. This is the right thing to say: if Alfonse and Bethany disagree over whether licorice is tasty, then if they have the exact same tastes, one of them is descriptively wrong about the way it tastes (and they would need to find out how it tastes, in order to settle the dispute factually).

So the possibility of descriptively faultless disagreement is not a mere semantic fact regarding the predicate and its relation to gustatory pleasure: it also hinges on what people’s experiential dispositions are actually like, hence on physiological and cultural facts, etc. And if everyone had the same tastes, tasty would no longer be a magnet for faultless disagreement, but would behave just like an ‘objective’ predicate that simply tracked properties of foods across the speech community. All this to say that tasty (like pretty much every other predicate, as we’ll see) is not intrinsically ‘subjective,’ nor intrinsically ‘evaluative,’ if these are meant to apply to expressions that allow for ‘faultless disagreement,’ but tends to be so in may situations only as the result of its lexical semantics in combination with contingent, extralinguistic facts about speakers.

6 The extension

Relativists have intended in the past that the novel machinery they introduce affect only a certain limited class of predicates, which are semantically special: these are the predicates of personal taste, the subjective predicates, or what have you. Insofar as the relativist machinery is meant to capture descriptively faultless disagreement, the idea appears to be that the machinery allowing for that disagreement is applicable only to a small subset of predicates, and that most predicates are not susceptible to the possibility of this sort of disagreement, since they perspective-invariantly denote certain worldly properties and relations across the speech community, and it is a purely ‘objective’ matter whether those predicates apply to certain individuals in certain scenarios.

But this is all mistaken. In fact, descriptively faultless disagreement is possible in the right circumstances with just about any predicate whatsoever. A popular example of this (appearing e.g. in Ludlow 2008: 118; Sundell 2011: §3.4) uses the predicate athlete, not typically considered amenable to relativist treatment. Suppose in \( w \) that Alfonse and Bethany are in disagreement over whether the Virginian Thoroughbred racehorse Secretariat is an athlete or not, but not because they differ as to what worldly properties they take Secretariat to have: rather, Alfonse is fine with calling nonhuman athletic competitors athletes, while Bethany reserves the term for humans alone. The scenario might be reported using the notion of faultless disagreement is ‘prima facie absurd’ from ‘a traditional, non-relativist point of view,’ which is odd, given that it is a ubiquitous fact of everyday life). These demands also seem to invoke a mistaken folk view of language as a kind of ‘tool’ that must have specific purposes.
our standard pair of attitude reports.

(59)  
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Alfonse thinks Secretariat is an athlete.
  \item Bethany thinks Secretariat is not an athlete.
\end{enumerate}

Supposing then that in \( w \) (as in the actual world) Secretariat really is a nonhuman athletic competitor: then neither Alfonse nor Bethany is making a descriptive error in holding their beliefs about Secretariat, despite the fact that their beliefs are doxastically incompatible, since one can’t take Secretariat to both be an athlete and not be an athlete descriptively coherently. Furthermore, the possibility of such descriptively faultless disagreement only arises when the criteria for applying the predicate differ across the speakers, just like we noted for the \textit{tasty} case in Section 5.2. The illusion that \textit{athlete} does not allow for this sort of disagreement comes only when we focus on individuals that are canonical cases or non-cases of athletes, according to the use of the word across the speech population.\(^{33}\)

Is this just something special about \textit{athlete}, then? Is it perhaps a ‘taste predicate’ in a way we previously haven’t understood? No, at least not unless every predicate is: pick any predicate you like, find a case where its application is contentious, and you can construct scenarios analogous to (59). Our purported perspective-invariant predicate from Section 1, \textit{vegetarian}, does the same, e.g. if we disagree about whether oysters are vegetarian; but the same holds of even less likely candidates, since it can be a matter of descriptively faultless dispute whether a table is wooden, if it is made of particle board, or whether a certain creature is a pony, if it doesn’t meet the size requirements for being a horse, but belongs to a breed that typically does. Ludlow (2014: 10-13) notes that similar disagreements over whether something is a sandwich are not only historically real, but have caused substantive legal disputes. Looking for cases in which it is disputable whether a predicate applies, and therefore which can invite descriptively faultless disagreement among speakers who make different decisions as to how to apply it, forms the material for an endless Austinian parlor game, which I invite the reader to play if they doubt it.

All these sorts of disagreements can be described using belief reports in the way we’ve done above: in general, the intensional content of a predicate can be interpreted ‘relative’ to the attitude holder of these reports. The result is that ‘faultless disagreement,’ as tracked by these reports, is a phenomenon with a far different scope than we imagined: if we take Lasersohn (2017: 7) seriously, that ‘a sentence expresses a matter of opinion if it is declarative in syntactic form, but gives rise to faultless disagreement when contradicted [or when embedded in contradictory belief reports – P. M.],’ then it would seem pretty much everything is a matter of opinion. But this is not the right lesson: rather, perspective-dependence as we’ve described it is just a ubiquitous feature of the grammar, which anchors predicates in attitude reports to the way that predicate’s conditions of application are construed by the agent. Whether the commitments described are a ‘matter of opinion’ is a separate question.

\(^{33}\)Remarkably, this observation sometimes goes the other way, for \textit{tasty}: the illusion that it intrinsically licenses faultless disagreement sometimes disappears, when focusing in cases that are consistent in the application of the predicate across the population: Pearson (2013: 136-137) reports for the sentence \textit{Soapy dishwasher is tasty} that it ‘is just plain false,’ and that in a case of a conversational dispute over the matter, ‘the intuition that neither party to the dispute is at fault evaporates...’ This is in line with what we’ll ultimately conclude, that there are no predicates that intrinsically license or don’t license faultless disagreement, but it depends on the extralinguistic scenario combined with their lexical semantics whether they do.
The proposal here is that the relativist semantics be extended, so that perspective-dependence affects all predicates, and perhaps even all lexical items, in a grammatically regular way, and this fact is responsible for the presence of descriptively faultless disagreement in general, not just for a restricted class of predicates with special semantic properties. In Section 6.1, we extend the analysis using *athlete* as our example, showing how to treat its perspective-dependence in terms of how speakers are disposed to apply the predicate based on how they take the world to be. In Section 6.2, we then circle back around to the case of *tasty*, and show how it coincides with the treatment of *athlete*.

### 6.1 Descriptive faultlessness: *athlete*

The disagreement described above between Alfonse and Bethany is descriptively faultless because Alfonse and Bethany do not apply the word *athlete* to the same sorts of individuals: Alfonse applies the noun to any individual that competes in athletic events, while Bethany applies it only to such competitors who are human. This, combined with the fact that Secretariat actually does compete in athletic events, and actually is not human, vindicates the descriptive commitments that both take on in their beliefs. In order to represent this, I'd like to revive an old notion in the philosophy of language, introduced by Chisholm (1951) and taken up by Carnap (1955): that is, the notion of an expression’s descriptive intension for an agent.

The idea is roughly this. In general, expressions are not used in an entirely consistent descriptive manner across a speech population, because different speakers can use the same expression with different criteria for how the world has to be in order for that expression to apply. The descriptive intension of an expression for a particular agent is the function from worlds to extensions that gives the conditions under which the agent is willing to apply the expression. This is meant to track the linguistic dispositions of the speaker, given how they take the world to be: roughly, to follow Chisholm (1951: 319, fn. 8), the descriptive intension of an expression for an agent tracks what the agent must believe the world to be like, if they are willing to apply the relevant expression in the appropriate way.

In the case of Alfonse and Bethany, we see that the descriptive intension of *athlete* is not the same for both of them. For Alfonse, *athlete* denotes the property of competing in athletic events; for Bethany, it denotes the property of competing in athletic events and being human. We write this as follows, where desc.int\((a, j, v)\) is the descriptive intension

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34I say ‘lexical item,’ because I’m open to the idea that functional material is not affected by perspective-dependence as diagnosed by the concerns here. It seems to me very difficult to license descriptively faultless disagreement using functional expressions, or to anchor their interpretation to the perspective of the agent of a belief report: thus, *Alfonse thinks the game isn’t over* might be read as involving Alfonse’s idiosyncratic interpretation of what it is to be over, but not his idiosyncratic interpretation of negation or tense. This may just be because speakers tend not to vary in their application of functional material so obviously, but it also may be a deeper feature regarding the difference between lexical and functional material.

35Or if they are willing to apply it sincerely, without relevant external pressure, and so on. The notion of dispositions to linguistic behavior here should be taken broadly enough that those dispositions might be masked by extenuating circumstances, and an agent might disingenuously apply a predicate, masking their ‘real’ belief in doing so.

36This is all a simplification, in that individual speakers typically do not have a single, well-defined descriptive intension for an expression: there is variation within as well as across speakers, and individual speakers...
of expression $\alpha$, for $j$ in $v$. We read ‘$\text{compete}'(w)(x)$’ and ‘$\text{human}'(w)(x)$’ in the obvious ‘disquotational’ way.

(60)  
\begin{align*}
\text{a. desc.int}(\text{athlete}, a, w) &= \lambda w'. \lambda x. \text{compete}'(w')(x) \\
\text{b. desc.int}(\text{athlete}, b, w) &= \lambda w'. \lambda x. \text{compete}'(w')(x) \land \text{human}'(w')(x)
\end{align*}

In attributing the relevant beliefs to both Alfonse and Bethany, we then attribute only the descriptive commitment that Secretariat fulfills the conditions imposed by their respective descriptive intensions for $\text{athlete}$: that is, Alfonse takes him to be a competitor, and Bethany takes him not to be a human competitor. Thus, even though Bethany disbelieves the same thing that Alfonse believes (viz., that Secretariat is an athlete), and so their beliefs are doxastically incompatible, neither of them commits to Secretariat having some worldly property he actually doesn’t in holding these beliefs: this is a descriptively faultless disagreement.

To fold this state of affairs into the relativist semantics, we return to the perspective parameter. What the perspective parameter does is use the individual-world pair to settle the descriptive intension for an expression, as construed by the relevant individual in the relevant world. So the extension of $\text{athlete}$ is as follows, making the expression sensitive to the world and perspective of evaluation.

(61)  
\[
[\text{athlete}]^{w,p} = \lambda x. \text{athlete}''(w)(p)(x)
\]

We then read the perspective-sensitive metalanguage predicate ‘$\text{athlete}''$’ as follows: it takes a world, perspective, and individual into a truth value, i.e. true just in case the individual in the world has the property expressed by the word $\text{athlete}$ as construed by the perspective.

(62)  
\[
\text{athlete}''(w)(j, v)(x) = \text{true} \text{ iff:} \\
\text{desc.int}(\text{athlete}, j, v)(w)(x)
\]

In other words, the perspective parameter now decides under what descriptive conditions the relevant expression applies. After this is fixed, what is left is a classical intension, or a property on a non-relativist semantics: whether this truly applies is then settled ‘objectively’ by the world-state and subject individual.

We can now show how the semantics works for an attitude report, giving the truth conditions for Alfonse thinks Secretariat is an athlete, taking the individual $s$ to be the referent of Secretariat, and taking the copula and indefinite article to be vacuous.\footnote{Note that in this derivation, the denotations of think and Secretariat do not invoke the perspective parameter non-trivially, in the way athlete does. Ultimately, though, these expressions may display a relevant perspective-sensitivity as well, since across the population speakers might use think to refer to different types of attitudes, or use the name Secretariat to refer to different individuals, hence the descriptive intensions for these expressions might also vary across speakers.} Since belief reports are autocentric, the report requires Alfonse to take Secretariat to be an athlete, according to his own linguistic dispositions.\footnote{Two interesting results arise from this sort of autocentric semantics targeting the agent’s linguistic dispositions.}
Alfonse thinks Secretariat is an athlete

\[ \text{[Alfonse thinks Secretariat is an athlete]} \]

\[ = \text{[\text{think}]}^{w,p}(\lambda(w',p'),{\text{athlete}})(\text{[Secretariat]})(\text{[Alfonse]}^{w,p}) \]

\[ = \text{[\text{think}]}^{w,p}(\lambda(w',p'),{\text{athlete}}')(p')(s)(a) \]

\[ = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{a,w}[\text{athlete}''(w')(a, w')(s)] \]

\[ = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{a,w}[\text{desc.int}(\text{athlete}, a, w')(w')(s)] \]

And so, to say Alfonse thinks Secretariat is an athlete in these circumstances is to attribute the descriptive belief to him that Secretariat competes in athletic events. If we give the truth conditions for Bethany’s contrary attitude report, Bethany thinks Secretariat is not an athlete, then we attribute the belief to her that Secretariat is not both an athletic competitor and a human, as follows, skipping the intermediate steps:

\[ \text{[Bethany thinks Secretariat is not an athlete]} \]

\[ = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{b,w}[\text{desc.int}(\text{athlete}, b, w')(w')(s)] \]

\[ = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{b,w}[\neg[\text{compete}'(w')(s) \land \text{human}'(w')(s)]] \]

That we have a case of descriptively faultless disagreement here is again shown by the fact that (i) Alfonse and Bethany’s beliefs are doxastically incompatible, and (ii) neither makes any descriptive error in holding their beliefs.

As to the first, recall the definition in (51) from Section 5.2: no agent can believe both that Secretariat is an athlete, and that he’s not, descriptively coherently. That is, regardless of what one takes to be the conditions of application for athlete, Secretariat cannot both meet and not meet them, and so if one takes him to be both an athlete and not, Secretariat is taken to be a way that he ‘objectively’ cannot be. If \( x \) believes both these things in \( w \) (65a), then \( x \)’s doxastic alternatives are empty (65b).

\[ \text{[Bethany thinks Secretariat is not an athlete]} \]

\[ = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{x,w}[\text{athlete}''(w')(x, w')(s) \land \neg\text{athlete}''(w')(x, w')(s)] \]

\[ = \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_{x,w} = \emptyset \]

But Alfonse and Bethany’s beliefs are descriptively compatible. The world of belief verifies their descriptive commitments in taking on their respective beliefs, as in (66). Since in \( w \) Secretariat is an athletic competitor, and not both a competitor and human, neither makes a descriptive error in believing what they do.

\[ \text{[Alfonse thinks Secretariat is an athlete]} \]

\[ = w \in \{w' : \text{compete}'(w')(s)\} \]

\[ = w \in \{w' : [\neg \text{compete}'(w')(s) \land \text{human}'(w')(s)]\} \]

dispositions. First, it follows that it is sometimes possible for an agent to change their beliefs, even if they do not change how they take the world to be, simply by adopting new linguistic behavior: this seems right, in that if Alfonse simply decided to apply athlete only to humans, even if he did not change his mind about any worldly properties Secretariat had, he would therefore cease to believe Secretariat was an athlete. Second, since an agent may be ignorant of its own linguistic dispositions, or not quite sure how they would use an expression in some scenario, it follows that belief reports need not commit an agent to what exactly their own dispositions are: if Alfonse thinks Secretariat is an athlete, he simply takes Secretariat to be such that he’d apply the word athlete to him, whatever his exact criteria for applying the word might be. This also seems right.
And so according to our definition of descriptively faultless disagreement from (54) in Section 5.2, this is a case of such disagreement, as desired. That’s it, then: on this approach, where lexical items are in general evaluated from perspectives, the possibility of descriptively faultless disagreement is ubiquitous, so long as the way in which distinct agents apply the words is relevantly distinct. Note that descriptively faultless disagreement would not be possible between Alfonse and Bethany, where they treated *athlete* as having the exact same descriptive application, just as we noted for *tasty* in Section 5.2.

And so we see that there is no type-theoretic distinction encoded into the semantics between ‘evaluative’ versus ‘descriptive,’ or ‘subjective’ versus ‘objective’ predicates, if this distinction is meant to track the possibility of this kind of disagreement. This doesn’t mean, of course, that all expressions vary on the perspective parameter in the same way, and so that all expressions are relevantly ‘evaluative’ or ‘descriptive’ in the same sense. Rather, there will be broad generalizations, as well as idiosyncrasies, about how speakers tend to apply certain expressions, and for many expressions, their descriptive use among speakers will for the most part overlap, yielding the possibility of descriptively faultless disagreement only in the contested cases.39

I see two major challenges confronting this sketch of an extension of relativist attitude reports going forward, which I will raise here without answering, though I am hopeful that neither is ultimately problematic. The issues are both empirical and conceptual, in that answering them properly would require knowing more about the way attitude reports are actually used, as well as seeing whether the formalism proposed here can adequately capture the facts surrounding that use.

The first challenge has to do with the way the perspective parameter’s function is characterized in terms of the disposition to linguistic behavior of agents. For cases like the example above, where the agents have a competence with the relevant lexical item, it’s more or less clear how the attitudes are to be read on this semantics. But there are a number of cases where the relevant linguistic competence is lacking for the agent, including when: (i) the agent lacks any linguistic competence (as with an animal or small child); (ii) the agent doesn’t speak the language in which the attitude is reported; (iii) the agent speaks the language, but doesn’t have any competence with a relevant lexical item; or (iv) the agent uses the relevant lexical item, but in a highly nonstandard, or ‘incompetent’ way.

What the semantics would do in such cases is as it stands unclear: but then, I am not at all sure for all of these cases what the relevant facts are, and the way an agent’s linguistic competence interacts with the beliefs that are attributable to them is full of fascinating and subtle complications.40 In some cases, linguistic competence with a certain expression seems

39 This of course may invite the question – but what is the ‘real’ classical intension of predicates like *athlete*? The semantics works fine without any such notion, and so I’m inclined to think it’s unreal. There are just ways speakers treat expressions as applying in certain cases, and that’s that. Of course, one can make generalizations about descriptive intensions over the speech population, as well as over the normative beliefs of speakers as to how the words ought to be used. One might also normatively ‘take a stand’ on how the expression is to be used by declaring some classical intension to be what the expression ‘really’ refers to, but I take it this is not a description of any linguistic properties the word has, but rather an insistence that it be used in a certain descriptive way.

40 A great discussion of these issues, which came out of the interest in the hyperintensionality of belief reports in the 1970s, is Partee (1973), in which Partee concludes that attitude reports make reference to a wide range of information about the agent’s relation to the linguistic material of the embedded clause, and
to be crucial: it is very hard to attribute to an agent who has no competence with a highly linguistically idiosyncratic predicate like *funky* the belief that a piece of music is funky. But in others, it seems only to matter whether the agent has mastered some synonym of the expression, or it may not matter whether they are competent with any such expression at all. The issue has to do with how to interpret the notion of descriptive intensions for an agent on the present treatment: how these are determined when the agent has the relevant linguistic competence is clearer, but how they are determined when they don’t have the relevant competence is as far as I’m concerned a wide-open question.41

The second challenge has to do with the scopal properties of perspective-dependent lexical items appearing within the scope of an attitude verb. As the semantics now stands, any expression occurring below the verb must be interpreted with respect to the descriptive intension for the agent of the attitude. But this isn’t always the case, and speakers sometimes are able to interpret such expressions as outside the scope of the attitude, so that the expression is effectively construed using the descriptive intension for the interlocutors, not for the attitude-holder. I don’t understand the conditions under which this can happen, and am not sure what technical mechanism would best treat it.

With all the above said, we can return to our original invocation of the perspective parameter in giving a lexical entry for *tasty*, and show how its use there matches the account of its function given for *athlete* here.

### 6.2 Back to *tasty*

With the broadening of the use of the perspective parameter to lexical items generally, we might seem to have two distinct notions of how it operates. This is exemplified by the difference between *tasty* and *athlete*, and what the perspective of evaluation tracks in determining the extension for each expression. Recall the metalanguage predicates used in their lexical entries:

\[(67)\]

\[
tasty'(w)(j,v)(x) = true \text{ iff:}\]
\[
in \: w, x \text{ is normally disposed to produce gustatory pleasure in any individual with the experiential dispositions of } j \text{ in } v.
\]

\[
\text{b. } \text{athlete}'(w)(j,v)(x) = true \text{ iff:}\]
\[
\text{desc.int(athlete, } j,v)(w)(x) = true
\]

not just its classical intensional content.

One might be tempted to appeal here to a non-linguistic entity that connects to dispositions to linguistic behavior via some bridge principle: to say, for instance, that the descriptive intension for what *athlete* denotes is determined by how the agent treats the descriptive conditions of application for the ‘notion’ or ‘concept’ of being an athlete, and that taking an expression to denote this notion or concept then requires behaving linguistically in a certain way, or some such. I’d like to hold off on introducing any such entities unless there is some reason to believe in them, and so prefer an account that purely appeals to linguistic behavior: this would put the present proposal in line with recent research, such as Kennedy and Willer (2016), which appeals to ‘discourse alternatives’ in characterizing a notion of ‘counterstances,’ Korucek, Jerzak and Rudolph (2020), which appeals to ‘plans for how to talk’ in developing a semantics for counterconventionals, and so on. Keep in mind that the issue here is what speakers *take to be* the descriptive intension for agents without the relevant linguistic competence – this can plausibly be described without appeal to anything too out there.
For *tasty*, the perspective tracks the experiential dispositions of $j$ in $v$, while for *athlete* it tracks the descriptive intension of the expression for $j$ in $v$; that is, it tracks the disposition of $j$ in $v$ to apply the expression *athlete*. And so it might seem that the perspective of evaluation is not playing a unified role across these cases.

But this is misleading. For *tasty* as well, the role played by the perspective is to track the descriptive intension of the predicate. This is because even here, the perspective does determine the descriptive conditions under which the judge is disposed to apply the predicate: it’s just that this disposition is itself determined by the judge’s experiential dispositions. In other words, for *tasty*, agents generally are disposed to apply the predicate to just those individuals that they think are disposed to gustatorily please them. This means that the conditions on the experiential dispositions and the conditions on the descriptive intension are typically one and the same: agents use their own experiential dispositions as the standard for the application of the predicate.\(^{42}\)

This means that we can bring the two cases into harmony if we break up the way *tasty* works into two component pieces: the perspective of evaluation determines the predicate’s extension in the same way it does for *athlete*, by providing the descriptive intension of the predicate (68a), and then there is a principle governing how this descriptive intension is determined, according to the judge’s experiential dispositions (68b). We read the metalanguage predicate ‘$gus''$ such that $gus''(w)(j,v)(x)$ is true iff in $w$, $x$ is disposed to produce gustatory pleasure in any individual with the experiential dispositions of $j$ in $v$.

\begin{equation}
\begin{align*}
\text{(68) a.} \quad & \text{tasty}''(w)(j,v)(x) = \text{true iff:} \\
& \text{desc.int(tasty,} j, v\text{)(}w\text{)(}x\text{)} = \text{true} \\
& \text{b. desc.int(tasty,} j, v\text{)} = \lambda w'. \lambda y. \text{gus}''(w')(j,w')(y)
\end{align*}
\end{equation}

That is, the descriptive intension of *tasty* for an individual in a world is the property of being disposed to produce gustatory pleasure in that individual. With this, we can keep the lexical entries of *tasty* and *athlete* on a par, using the same type-theoretic compositional schema.

\begin{equation}
\begin{align*}
\text{(69) a.} \quad & \text{[tasty]}^{w,p} = \lambda x. \text{tasty}''(w)(p)(x) \\
& \text{b. [athlete]}^{w,p} = \lambda x. \text{athlete}''(w)(p)(x)
\end{align*}
\end{equation}

Our usual attitude reports, e.g. *Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty*, then turn out the usual way, with the last lines being derivable by appeal to the principle in (68b), where $j = a$ and $v = w'$. Again, this means that Alfonse takes the flavor of licorice to be disposed to please him, and the usual descriptive commitments arise.

\(^{42}\)MacFarlane (2014: 4) notes this connection between speakers’ experiential dispositions and their willingness to apply *tasty* in his ‘TP’ principle: “If you know first-hand how something tastes, call it ‘tasty’ just in case its flavor is pleasing to you, and ‘not tasty’ just in case its flavor is not pleasing to you.” I say that agents are ‘generally’ disposed to linguistic behavior in this way, because while this is a robust default, it has exceptions: it’s possible for an agent to judge that something is tasty (*simpliciter*, and not exocentrically) in a way that doesn’t match up with their own experiential dispositions, where they think those dispositions are for some reason defective, e.g. for gustatory experience, if the tongue is burnt, or when for some reason the agent is depreciatory towards their own tastes, defers to an authority, or takes themselves not to be an appropriate evaluator of the stimulus. In these cases, agents still believe using their own linguistic dispositions (and so the belief is still autocentric), but these dispositions are no longer tracked by the ‘defective’ experiential dispositions.
Alfonse thinks licorice is tasty

\[
\forall w', \in \text{Dox}_{a,w} [\text{tasty}''(w')(a, w')(l)] = \forall w', \in \text{Dox}_{a,w} [\text{desc.int}(\text{tasty}, a, w')(l)] = \forall w', \in \text{Dox}_{a,w} [\lambda w''. \lambda y. \text{gus}''(w'')(a, w'')(y)(l)] = \forall w', \in \text{Dox}_{a,w} [\text{gus}''(w')(a, w')(l)]
\]

The result is that the lexical semantics of tasty are in a way different from the lexical semantics of athlete, though not due to any type-theoretic difference, or because one is non-trivially perspective-dependent while the other isn’t. Rather, they are equally perspective-dependent according to their compositional skeleton, but tasty in addition operates according to a kind of experiential principle, where agents apply it according to their experiential dispositions. By contrast, athlete has no experiential principle governing its descriptive intension for a speaker: the variation across the population there is grammatically idiosyncratic, while it is grammatically systematic for tasty.

The question of the difference in evaluativity between these two predicates is therefore one of how this experiential semantics, or lack of it, influences speakers to apply the same predicate in different circumstances, and how the resulting misalignment in descriptive intensions across the speech community results in the possibility of descriptively faultless disagreement. To simplify, athlete will come to license such disagreement where there is variation in how the word athlete is applied for grammatically idiosyncratic reasons, hence in borderline or indeterminate cases of athletes, while tasty will come to license such disagreement when experiential dispositions regarding gustatory pleasure misalign.

But this is all an outcome of the way the semantic machinery works, which in itself makes no reference to ‘subjectivity,’ ‘evaluativity,’ and so on. Rather, our newly imagined relativist semantics complicates the intensions of expressions by making them sensitive not only to the way things are (the world parameter), but also the way speakers behave to construe the descriptive application conditions of expressions (the perspective parameter). Descriptively faultless disagreement in general then has to do fundamentally with the fact that speakers can competently apply the very same predicate in different worldly circumstances, and the purported subjectivity of a predicate derives from the principles that cause speakers to differ in this way: in the case of predicates like tasty, these differences will themselves automatically tend to track differences in speakers themselves.

To the lexical semantics, then. The above implies that tasty is sensitive to experiential dispositions in a way that athlete is not. This is not an idiosyncratic or ad hoc feature of this particular predicate: there exists a massive class of predicates with similar lexical semantics that display the same autocentric effects. These include, among others: (i) other adjectives derived from words denoting sensory modalities, like smelly; (ii) adjectives derived from object-experiencer psych verbs using -ing, like interesting; (iii) adjectives derived from subject-experiencer psych verbs using -able, like detestable; (iv) adjectives derived from sensory verbs like look using -ing as well, like weird-looking; (v) sensory verbs like look composed with adjectives, like look weird; (vi) sensory verbs like sound, composed with clauses e.g. using like-complementizers, like sound like somebody is having a party; (vii) verbs and adjectives that idiosyncratically contain sensory information, like stink and delicious.

Each of the above sorts of predicates behaves like tasty, in that speakers are disposed to apply them to those individuals they take to be disposed to affect them experientially in
some way, as determined by the lexical semantics of the relevant expressions: *smelly* applies to stimuli disposed to produce strong, usually unpleasant, smells; *interesting* to stimuli disposed to produce interest, and so on. In every case, the autocentric determination of the descriptive intension of the expression licenses faultless disagreement, precisely where speakers’ experiential dispositions tend to differ on these matters (for instance, since what interests speakers varies widely, descriptively faultless disagreement arises frequently over whether individuals are interesting).

Why all of these expressions, which Rudolph (2020) calls ‘experiential predicates,’ behave this way is not well-understood, but the phenomenon is highly regular, and the effect of the presence of an experiencer on judge-dependence has been recognized, e.g. by Bylinina (2017). The hope is therefore that the principle in (68b) is somehow tied to their experiential lexical semantics. But in order to know whether this is, we have to move on to the lexical semantics, having finished the task of setting up the general type-theoretic framework in which all kinds of self-directed descriptive intensions arise. A relativist semantics as outlined above provides a formal setup within which these lexical differences can be explored, and the similarities and differences of all sorts of ‘subjective’ or ‘evaluative’ behavior of various expressions can be studied.

7 Conclusion

With all the above said, we have an explicit account of how a relativist semantics delivers on a straightforward notion of faultless disagreement, in the form of what we’ve called descriptively faultless disagreement. We further have shown that cases of descriptively faultless disagreement are more ubiquitous than once thought, and not limited to a special set of perspective-sensitive expressions. We therefore have an explication of a relativist semantics derived from the previously existing literature, as well as an extension of that semantics to cover new cases that also have the features relativists were initially trying to capture.

The key innovation I’ve suggested is to read the function of the perspective paramater in a new way: a perspective is still an individual-world pair, but it tracks the linguistic dispositions of the individual in the world, and so settles how certain expressions of the language are descriptively applied by a speaker. All lexical items are subject to inter-speaker variation as to their descriptive application, and so perspective-sensitivity is not a special feature of a restricted class of expressions, though expressions may differ to what extent, in what circumstances, and for what reasons speakers differ in their application.

The possibility of descriptively faultless disagreement, as described by belief reports, then follows from the way this compositional framework is set up: wherever speakers do not relevantly apply expressions in the same way, they will be able to think doxastically incompatible r-propositions that nonetheless mutually vindicate the descriptive commitments incurred by each agent taken in isolation. Further, due to the lexical semantics of specific expressions, application of these expressions may automatically track features of the speakers themselves (such as their experiential dispositions). This, along with the fact that the same intensional object can yield different descriptive commitments depending on who believes it, leads to the impression that the culprit expressions are ‘subjective.’

Before closing, a word on where this proposal leaves us might be in order. The key
feature of this semantic framework that makes descriptively faultless disagreement possible, as mentioned several times, is the fact that the intensional objects of belief are r-propositions, and the descriptive commitments that attend believing an r-proposition may non-trivially depend on who the believer is. This means that unlike on a nonrelativist semantics, the identity of an object of belief patterns apart from its descriptive commitments. This might be puzzling: if two agents can believe the same thing while not incurring the same descriptive commitments, what does it mean to say that they believe the same thing?

The straightforward answer to this question is that the compositional semantics treats their beliefs as targeting the same intensional object. The importance of this in practice is diffuse, and can’t be spelled out offhand, because it will have all sorts of consequences throughout the grammar and so for speaker behavior. Just as an example, it will entail: (i) that it is possible to reference multiple agents’ beliefs using a single propositional anaphor (or rather r-propositional anaphor), even where their descriptive commitments differ; (ii) that it is possible to create felicitous targets of assertion, denial, retraction, and so on in conversation, which impose different descriptive commitments among the interlocutors who perform these speech acts targeted at the very same linguistic material; and (iii) that it is possible to report agents as sharing a belief, e.g. using verbs like agree, even if those agents’ descriptive commitments differ. In treating these beliefs as identical, the grammar allows for the possibility of all sorts of commitments and discourse moves not otherwise possible.

We can illustrate this anxiety over the identity conditions on beliefs with an example. One might worry, for Alfonse and Bethany’s athlete debate in Section 6: since they apply the predicate in distinct circumstances, don’t they ‘mean’ different things by it? Aren’t they therefore just ‘talking past each other?’ How then do they believe and disbelieve the ‘same’ thing? But this is the old prejudice speaking: indeed there is a sense in which they do mean the same thing, in that they take each other to target the same intensional object in expressing their beliefs. This is important if they need to decide whether Secretariat is an athlete, not any of the descriptive issues surrounding this: perhaps only individuals we think are athletes receive certain rights or honors, and so what we believe in this regard has important social and ethical implications beyond the descriptive commitments involved, and these commitments revolve around trying to decide a single issue. If the interlocutors only care about descriptive issues, then to be sure they might talk past each other, or not care whether they descriptively faultlessly disagree: but this actually happens, and so its possibility should be allowed as well.

I take this complication of the nature of belief to be a virtue, in that belief reports and the disagreements they track actually are multifaceted in this way, tracking speakers’ descriptive commitments and their willingness to apply certain expressions (and incur any non-descriptive commitments that attend this) at the same time. The focus on descriptive commitments alone in characterizing beliefs has been an oversimplifying error, in general and not just for ‘predicates of personal taste.’ As to what this means for speakers, the moral is the same as before: this is how the semantics works, and speakers can do whatever they want with it.
References


