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THE PRAGMATICS OF INSENSITIVE ASSESSMENTS

*Understanding The Relativity of Assessments of Judgments of Personal
Taste, Epistemic Modals, and More*¹

ABSTRACT: In assessing the veridicality of utterances, we normally seem to assess the satisfaction of conditions that the speaker had been concerned to get right in making the utterance. However, the debate about assessor-relativism about epistemic modals, predicates of taste, gradable adjectives and conditionals has been largely driven by cases in which seemingly felicitous assessments of utterances are insensitive to aspects of the context of utterance that were highly relevant to the speaker's choice of words.

In this paper, we offer an explanation of why certain locutions invite insensitive assessments, focusing primarily on 'tasty' and 'might'. We spell out some reasons why felicitous insensitive assessments are puzzling and argue briefly that recent attempts to accommodate such assessments (including attempts by John MacFarlane, Kai von Fintel and Anthony Gillies) all fail to provide more than hints at a solution to the puzzle. In the main

part of the paper, we develop an account of felicitous insensitive assessments by identifying a number of pragmatic factors that influence the felicity of assessments. Before closing, we argue that the role of these factors extends beyond cases considered in the debate about assessor-relativism and fits comfortably with standard contextualist analyses of the relevant locutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Natural language contains a wide range of phrases dedicated to expressing agreement or disagreement with beliefs and utterances, and assessments of their veridicality: 'yes', 'no', 'that is true', 'that is false', 'he is wrong about that', 'she is mistaken', 'I agree', 'I disagree', 'she knows that', 'that is not the case', 'I take that back', and so forth.

When we assess utterances using such assessment phrases, we normally (barring misunderstanding, etc) seem to assess whether the propositions *that the utterer had been concerned to get across* are satisfied. In many cases, this means being sensitive to the context of utterance and the communicative interests of the utterer. This seems especially true for utterances involving paradigmatically context-dependent expressions like pronouns, indexicals, demonstratives and definite descriptions, but also for expressions like 'right / left' and gradable adjectives like 'tall', 'rich' and 'dirty', and might well extend in a potentially open-ended manner. If we want to assess whether Xena was correct when she told Zac,

(1) They live in the first big building to the right of the cathedral.

we need a rich understanding of the context to figure out what Xena referred to by 'they', what counts as a 'big' building, relative to what perspective we should understand 'right' and what cathedral is meant. Conversely, Xena is interested in communicating that certain conditions hold, and interested in using an expression that will communicate just that in the context of utterance. There is thus a convergence of speaker and assessor interests: in making her utterance, Xena wants to get across that certain conditions obtain, and as assessors of the truth of what has been said, we want to determine whether *those* conditions do indeed obtain.

Though convergence of speaker and assessor concerns might be the typical case, the debate about so-called *assessor-relativism* about expressions like epistemic and deontic modals, predicates of taste, graded adjectives and conditionals has been largely driven by cases in which seemingly felicitous assessments of beliefs or utterances are strikingly *insensitive* to considerations that were understood as relevant for the formation of the belief, or to aspects of the context of utterance that were highly relevant to the speaker's choice of words. For example, when one speaker, A, has said that something is tasty, meaning to express that it accords with his taste, it might be appropriate for B to reply, 'No, it is too salty', based on the fact that B dislikes its salty taste, without regard to whether it accords with A's taste. In such cases, the assessment is insensitive to A's standard of taste, insensitive to what A was concerned to get right when judging that the dish is tasty, and insensitive to the condition he hoped to convey by his utterance.

Our main objective in this paper is to offer an explanation of why certain locutions and conversational contexts invite or require such insensitive assessments. In sections 2 and 3, we will provide examples of felicitous insensitive assessments of subjective taste-claims and epistemically modal claims, briefly arguing against attempts to show that assessments in these types of examples are either infelicitous or sensitive to speaker concerns. In section 4, we spell out some of the reasons that felicitous insensitive assessments are puzzling. In section 5, we look at three recent attempts to accommodate insensitive assessments: the appeal to assessor-relative truth made popular by John MacFarlane and others, an appeal to pragmatic under-determination of propositional content recently proposed by Kai von Fintel and Anthony Gillies, and our own favourite approach, which takes the pragmatics of acts of assessment to provide the requisite theoretical space. We argue that all three fail to provide more than hints at satisfying explanations. In sections 6 through 13, we develop our account of felicitous insensitive assessments by identifying a number of factors that influence the pragmatics of assessments, focusing in turn on subjective taste-claims, epistemic modals, ought-claims, indicative conditionals and gradable adjectives. In section 14, finally we argue that the explanations that we have provided mesh most comfortably with our own approach, and briefly discuss some standard objections.

A terminological clarification: 'conditions', as we use the term, are satisfied or obtain absolutely, not relative to some parameter or other, and 'propositions' correspondingly signifies bearers of absolute truth values. They thus correspond to what François Recanati (2007), following Barwise and Etchemendy, calls 'Austinian propositions', or to *propositions at times and worlds* in Kaplanesque semantics.

2. FELICITOUS INSENSITIVE ASSESSMENTS OF SUBJECTIVE TASTE-CLAIMS

To ask whether something is tasty, it seems, is to ask whether it accords with some relevant standard of taste. In most cases, the relevant standard is that of oneself: when we search the fridge for something tasty, we are typically searching for something that accords with our own palate. At other times, however, we might be concerned to find something that is tasty for those with a different palate, or for a group of people: a parent might ask whether something is tasty for their toddler, and whether he likes fish or not, a waiter might inform us that if we like fish, the main course is delicious. These concerns of judges of taste and of people communicating that something is tasty seem to be captured in the following (partial) analysis of 'tasty', which makes the truth-conditions of taste-claims dependent on features of the context of utterance:²

TASTY-C: An utterance of a sentence of the form *X is tasty* is true if and only if X accords with the standard of taste that is relevant in the context of utterance (cf. Glanzberg 2007; Schaffer 2011).

Correspondingly, it is tempting to say that *beliefs* that X is tasty always relate X to some standard of taste and are true if and only if X accords with that standard. Similar analyses seem tempting for 'disgusting', 'delicious' and other predicates of taste and corresponding beliefs.

Our main interest in this section, however, is not to argue for an analysis of 'tasty', but to identify the concerns of judges and speakers that seem to govern what judgments and utterances they make, and to describe how these relate to concerns that drive explicit assessments of these utterances and judgments. Here is one example that we take to illustrate felicitous insensitive assessments of taste-judgments:

Fish Sticks: At the family dining table, Eduardo has just had a second serving of fish sticks. With his mouth stuffed, he happily exclaims:

(2) They are really tasty!

Here are three possible comments by his sister, Felicia:

(3) No, they are too bland. Can we please have the other kind next time?

(4) Yes, they are super tasty. Can I have some more too?

(5) ? Yes, you are right. But I don't like them; they are too bland.

The first two replies look natural, whereas the third seems defective, almost contradictory. However, it is natural to assume that Eduardo volunteered because he thought that the fish sticks would accord with *his* palate (not with the palates of other people), and it is natural to assume that he wanted to communicate this thought. It is also natural to assume that if Felicia uttered (3), the assessment that she expressed would be based on the fact that *she* found the fish sticks too bland. The seemingly felicitous assessment expressed by 'no' in (3) is thus insensitive to Eduardo's concerns. Moreover, it is natural to assume that the positive and seemingly felicitous assessment in (4) was based on whether the fish sticks accorded with Felicia's palate, not on whether it accorded with the palates of others. Similarly, the reason that 'yes' in (5) seems unnatural is that it is followed by Felicia's claim that she does not like the fish sticks; the fact that Eduardo most likely got right what he hoped to get right does not seem to support the affirmative assessment.

Insensitive assessments about taste-judgments might also take the form of retractions. Looking at a film clip documenting the dinner conversation, the grown Eduardo who no longer fancies fish sticks might naturally comment on (2) by saying 'I take that back; I no longer fancy fish sticks', but would much less naturally say 'I was right, but I no longer like fish sticks'.³

It is worth mentioning that not all assessment phrases seem equally suitable for insensitive assessments. Many would find the following reactions to Eduardo's (2) inappropriate, unless said in jest:

(6) ? That's false. They are too bland.

(7) ? He is mistaken. They are too bland.

Later on, we will propose an explanation of the difference between (3) on the one hand and (6) and (7) on the other.⁴

As we have noted, the existence of felicitous insensitive assessments is somewhat contentious. For example, Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne (2009: 110–111, 117–118, e.g.) argue that much of our sense that there is disagreement between people with different sensibilities concerning what is disgusting is based on a naïve chauvinism: when we reflect sufficiently on various possible sources of error and explanations of our different sensibilities, we often see that the parties are not really in disagreement. But while it is true that there are elements of chauvinism involved in some perceived disagreements, we don't think that there need be any chauvinism involved in the sort of case we have looked at here.

One might also suggest that Eduardo meant his judgment to relate the fish sticks to some collectively embraced standard of taste rather than just his own. It is extremely plausible that this is our concern when we make taste-judgments by way of recommending a restaurant or a course to others. If this were Eduardo's concern, and if his recommendation was directed at a group including Felicia, Felicia could sensitively reject Eduardo's claim based on the fact that she found them too bland. But this interpretation of *Fish Sticks* seems unnatural, and the example can be modified to rule it out. First, the example seems to work well in a context where Eduardo already knows that some or even all other family members dislike fish sticks. Second, if Felicia is understood as rejecting the collective claim in (3), her own claim that the fish sticks are too bland cannot plausibly relate to the same standard, as she has every reason to think that they are not bland by Eduardo's standard. Nevertheless, Eduardo could naturally respond to (3) with 'No, they are not bland at all. They're yummy!' At that point, we would again have an example of a felicitous insensitive assessment, this time in relation to 'too bland'.

A different kind of objection, pressed by Jonathan Schaffer (2011, §4.1), notes that if Felicia responds to Eduardo's (2) with

(8) No, they are not tasty. They are too bland.

Eduardo can retort

(9) I didn't say that you would like them. I just said that *I* like them.

But if Eduardo's retort is felicitous, that seems to reveal that Felicia's insensitive assessment is *infelicitous*. However, (9) seems considerably less natural as a response to (3), the point of which seems to be to express Felicia's subjective taste-judgment, perhaps in order to affect future purchases, than to (8), which is more naturally understood as directing criticism at Eduardo's judgment. This suggests that subtle pragmatic issues involving a wide range of parameters determine whether insensitive assessments are appropriate or not, but it does nothing to show that there are no felicitous insensitive assessments. (In section 9, we offer an explanation of why criticism or accusatory connotations undermine insensitive assessments.)

3. FELICITOUS INSENSITIVE ASSESSMENTS OF EPISTEMIC MODALS

In this section we turn to epistemic modals, and more specifically claims and judgments to the effect that something *might* be the case, and argue that they are subject to felicitous insensitive assessments, just like taste-claims.

The central cognitive role of might-judgments seems to be to guide strategies under conditions of uncertainty. When we think that something might be the case, we are disposed to plan for the contingency that it is indeed the case or to invest resources into finding out whether it is the case. Normally, such strategies are guided by what we can and cannot rule out given the information accessible to us at the time, and on most occasions that also seems to be what guides our might-judgments: we take it that P might be the case insofar as we take P to be compatible with information accessible to us at the time (with different standards of accessibility in different contexts). When the gambler considers whether the next card might be an ace, she seems to be asking whether she knows anything that rules out that it is an ace or can gain access to such knowledge (within the rules of the game). Sometimes, though, our might-judgments relate to other bodies of information. On such occasions, they are sometimes expressed with explicit relativizers, as when we say that 'for all he knows, we might still

be at the airport', but context can often make clear what the relevant body of information might be. Particularly interesting are cases where might-judgments relate to information possessed by some collective, perhaps made up by the speaker and her interlocutors. The following sort of analysis of might-claims seems to adequately capture the variety of concerns that we have when we want to convey judgments to the effect that something might be the case:

MIGHT-C: An utterance of a sentence of the form *P might be the case* is true if and only if P is compatible with the body of information that is relevant in the context of utterance (cf. DeRose 1991, 1998; Bach 2011; Schaffer 2011; Dowell 2011).⁵

Again, if this is right it would seem equally plausible that *beliefs* that *P might be the case* always relate to some body of information and are true if and only if P is compatible with that body.

Like our examples of felicitous insensitive assessments of taste-claims, the following example involving might-claims is meant to be one where speaker intentions are publicly accessible and relevant to what is at issue in the context:

Lost Keys: Beth, who came home from the grocery store only a few minutes ago, asks Alice whether she has seen Beth's keys. Alice, remembering that Beth forgot the keys in the car last week when she came home from the store, answers:

(10) They might be in the car.

Beth in turn replies with either of the following:

(11) No, they can't be. I still had them when I came in.

(12) Yes, you are right. I'll go check.

Both Alice's answer and Beth's possible replies (11) and (12) seem natural enough. At the same time, reflection suggests that the assessments they expressed are insensitive to what Alice was concerned to get right when replying to Beth's question.⁶

It is natural to assume, we think, that Alice's ground for saying what she said was that the keys being in the car was compatible with

information readily available to *her* at the time. First, she would be warranted in thinking this. Since Beth had forgotten her keys in the car before, the keys being in the car was not ruled out by any impeccable habits of Beth's. Second, it seems unlikely that Alice would have any strong reason to either conclude or rule out that Beth remembered bringing the keys this time. Given these two conditions, it seems unlikely that Alice would be concerned to assert a proposition implying that Beth did not remember bringing the keys, such as the proposition that the keys being in the car is compatible with the set of information available to *either* Beth or Alice. This suggests that Alice's utterance of (10) was based on a 'solipsistic' body of information.

Given this solipsistic understanding of Alice's concerns in uttering (10), Beth is insensitive to these concerns if she accepts or rejects the utterance based on whether *she* herself has information ruling out that the keys are in the car. But this is exactly the sort of consideration that we naturally take to ground her assessments in (11) and (12) given the sentences following the assessments. Since both (11) and (12) seem natural, there appears to be felicitous insensitive assessments of might utterances. Conversely, some *sensitive* assessments of might utterances seem deeply problematic. Consider the following as a reply to (10):

(13) ? You're right. But I still had them when I came in.

Here, there seems to be a strong conflict between the conjuncts of (13). But the two conjuncts would seem to be reconciled if we understood 'you're right' as assessing whether the keys being in the car is compatible with Alice's information. Apparently, then, we not only find the insensitive assessments natural; we *resist* the sensitive assessment even at the price of attributing contents with troubling internal conflicts.

The attribution of insensitive assessments in this sort of case is not uncontroversial. The most powerful challenge comes from a forthcoming paper by Janice Dowell, where she looks at a wide range of cases seemingly involving insensitive assessments, including one similar to *Lost Keys*.⁷ Contrary to what we have said, she suggests that people would naturally take the person asked about the whereabouts of the keys (here: Alice) to make her might-claim relative to the set of propositions that are known by either of the parties involved in the conversation, not just information available to that person, because such a

'communal' claim would contribute more to the search than would the solipsistic one. Dowell's hypothesis, then, is that we understand (10) as saying that the keys being in the car is compatible with what is known by either Alice or Beth.

Apart from the suggestion that such a communal claim would contribute more towards the purpose of the conversation and would make good sense of both Beth's possible replies, two other observations might seem to support this hypothesis. They emerge if we compare (10) with another reply Alice can give if she has no information about whether Beth knows whether she brought the keys into the apartment:

(14) Could they be in the car?

Which utterance should Alice make? *When comparing (10) and (14)*, we share what according to Dowell is the majority intuition, namely that (14) is preferable and that (10) now seems unwarranted. These intuitions make sense on the assumption that both (10) and (14) are understood as concerned with non-solipsistic epistemic possibilities, relating to a body of information that includes information available to Beth, not just information available to Alice.

Dowell's challenge is a worthy one, but we nevertheless think that the natural initial interpretation of the case takes Alice to have solipsistic concerns, and takes Beth to accept or reject Alice's claim based on information going beyond those concerns. We have three reasons for thinking this:

First, there seem to be strong independent reasons not to think that interpretations of (10) made prior to comparisons with (14) are communal. Suppose that after Beth made clear that she was looking for her keys, Alice contributed the following:

(15) Given the information we have now, we can't rule out that they're in the car.

(15) *immediately* raises concerns about warrant in a way that (10) does not. This strongly suggests that (10) is not understood as a communal claim. Moreover, consider the following dialogue, set in the same situation as *Lost keys*, with (10) reproduced as (17):

(16) Beth: I seem to have lost my keys.

(17) Alice: They might be in the car.

- (18) Beth: No, I distinctly remember having them when I came in. Why did you say that without asking me?
- (19) Alice: Look, I only said they *might be* there—and they might have been. *Sheesh!*⁸

Here, Beth's final question seems off the mark, but it would not have been if (17) had been taken to express a communal claim, nor as a follow-up on (15). This again suggests that we do not naturally take (10) to express a communal claim.

Second, in contributing to a collective search, a speaker might be perfectly cooperative in conveying that a certain possibility is compatible with *her own* information. If the possibility happens to be equally compatible with what others know, they can add that information; if it is not, they have the opportunity to help the speaker prune her epistemic possibilities. At the same time, it is of course true that if one is warranted in asserting that the possibility is compatible with the knowledge of all involved, this would be more helpful. However, since it is fairly obvious that Alice would not be warranted in making the stronger claim—as witnessed by concerns raised by (15)—the assumption that she is cooperative should only push us towards the communal interpretation if we have some strong and obvious reason to think that she *would* make an obviously unwarranted claim. But *Lost Keys* does not give us any such reason.

Third, we think that neither the preference for the interrogative (14) ('Could they be in the car?') over (10) ('They might be in the car'), nor the intuition that (10) is unwarranted that seems to be triggered by the comparison with (14), indicates that Alice is *initially* understood as concerned to express a communal proposition. Instead, the introduction of (14) implicitly presents Alice as consciously aware of the possibility that Beth might know whether she brought the keys from the car, and such awareness would make the interrogative preferable and the utterance of (10) unwarranted.

To see this, notice first that the question contributes *more* to the project of finding the keys than would a solipsistic might-judgment. Expressing the solipsistic might-judgment would (a) raise the possibility that the keys are in the car and (b) convey that Alice lacks information that rules it out. However, *asking* Beth whether the keys might be in the car would also do both (a) and (b), but would additionally (c) express

recognition of the fact that Beth might be in an epistemically superior position relative to this possibility, thus contributing in one more way towards the goal at hand.⁹ In a choice between the two locutions, a cooperative speaker will thus choose the interrogative. On the other hand, the richer contribution of the interrogative also demands more processing on the part of the speaker: in particular, it demands a more definite view of the relative epistemic access that the parties have to the possibility in question and to possible informational bases. The suggestion, then, is this: when we first consider *Lost Keys*, we attribute a solipsistic concern to Alice. In doing so, we are not assuming that she has paid much attention to her and Beth's relative epistemic access: we just see her presenting a possibility as compatible with what she knows. When we are subsequently asked to compare (10) and (14), however, we are thereby introduced to a perspective where Alice pays attention to the fact that Beth might have more relevant information. Now the question seems much more appropriate than the claim (depending, as always, on prosody and other details on the context).

This leaves the question of why the introduction of the question leads many to feel not only that (10) is inappropriate, but also that it is unwarranted. The explanation, we think, is quite simple: Since making the solipsistic claim might be inappropriate given the awareness of Beth's epistemic position—the question would be preferable—what we are considering when asking whether Alice might be warranted in uttering (10) is now indeed whether she would be warranted in making the communal claim. Since she lacks such warrant, (10) now strikes us as unwarranted. If this explanation is correct, however, this intuition, or the intuition that (14) is preferable, does not indicate that the *initial* interpretation of *Lost Keys* is communal.

All told, then, we think that the natural interpretation of Alice's concerns in making and expressing the might-judgment by uttering (10) takes these concerns to relate to a solipsistic body of information, not one including information possessed exclusively by Beth. Since both (11) and (12) were natural replies, expressions of might-judgments seem to be subject to felicitous insensitive assessments.¹⁰

As with assessments of taste-judgments, some assessment phrases go less well with insensitive assessments (Egan 2007, 4n). When Alice suggests that the keys might be in the car, the following replies would

seem decidedly uncooperative:

(20) That's not true / That's false / You're mistaken. I still had them when I came in.

We later attempt an explanation of the difference in reactions to these and to (11).

4. THE PUZZLE OF APPARENTLY FELICITOUS INSENSITIVE ASSESSMENTS

Thus far, we have argued that there are felicitous insensitive assessments of taste- and might-claims. However, their existence is puzzling in a number of ways. They depart from what seems to be the norm for assessments, namely the sort of coincidence in speaker and assessor interests illustrated by how we approach Xena's telling Zac that 'They live in the first big building to the right of the cathedral.' It would seem thoroughly misplaced to accept or reject Xena's utterance on the ground that some people that *we* have in mind live to the left of a cathedral *we* have in mind as seen from a direction *we* have in mind, unless those were the people, the cathedral, and the perspective Xena had in mind or could reasonably be taken to have in mind when addressing Zac.¹¹ But apparently such shifts are possible or even mandatory when it comes to 'tasty' or 'might', at least in certain contexts. The question is *why*.

Insensitive assessments are also psychologically puzzling. To attribute a sincere assertion to a person, one needs to grasp what proposition the person was asserting and expressing the acceptance of: one will thus already have *that* proposition readily available for assessment. (When Beth takes Alice to think that the keys might be in the car, we can assume that Beth understands that it is based on solipsistic considerations, and when Felicia takes Eduardo to think that fish sticks are tasty, we can assume that she understands that his thought relates to his standard of taste.) Moreover, since the proposition in question is one that the speaker takes to be true and wants to communicate, assessing whether it is in fact true would seem to be of interest for any cooperative addressee. In fact, it would seem to require a mental effort *not* to assess whether a proposition is true once it is represented before one's mind, as it were.¹²

Finally, the puzzle has a social or normative aspect. If Eduardo is concerned to express that the fish sticks are pleasing to *his* palate, how can it be *fair* of Felicia to assess his utterance based on *her* palate? And if Alice was concerned to express that the keys being in the car was compatible with information accessible to her, how can it be fair of Beth to assess Alice's utterance based on compatibility with information going beyond that?

The main contribution of this paper is an attempt to begin answering such questions, explaining why certain kinds of expressions and judgments invite insensitive assessments, and explaining why such assessments are psychologically and conversationally appropriate and sometimes required. First, however, we shall briefly note the relation between this issue and the debate about assessor-relativism, where seemingly felicitous assessments have been taken to call for some radical changes in philosophical semantics. We think that the question of insensitive assessment is of independent interest, but we shall argue that one of the upshots of the explanation proposed here is that insensitive assessment gives us no reason to give up standard contextualist accounts in favour of an assessor-relative semantics, or non-standard forms of contextualism.

5. ASSESSOR-RELATIVISM, CLOUDY CONTEXTUALISM AND C-ASSESSMENT

We have said that in light of the sort of concerns people have when deciding whether something is tasty or might be the case and when expressing such judgments using 'tasty' and 'might', the following sorts of analyses seem tempting:

TASTY-C: An utterance of a sentence of the form *X is tasty* is true if and only if X accords with the standard of taste that is relevant in the context of utterance.

MIGHT-C: An utterance of a sentence of the form *P might be the case* is true if and only if P is compatible with the body of information that is relevant in the context of utterance.

But the existence of felicitous insensitive assessments make trouble for these analyses given something like the following natural-sounding

standard principle of assessment:

S-ASSESSMENT: When we assess assertive utterances or judgments using various assessment phrases, we normally (barring confusion, misunderstanding, lack of cooperation, etc) assess the satisfaction of their truth-conditions.

The problem is that in the cases of felicitous insensitive assessments that we have looked at, the assessments have *not* seemed to relate to the standards of taste or bodies of information that were relevant in the context of utterance, but rather to those relevant to the assessor, or relevant in the context of assessment.

To accommodate felicitous insensitive assessments of judgments of taste or epistemic modals within the constraints given by S-ASSESSMENT, it thus seems that the truth-conditions of the sentences need to depend, somehow, on the assessor, or his standard of taste or accessible body of information. Consequently, a number of authors (MacFarlane 2011; Egan 2007; Egan et al. 2005; Lasersohn 2005; Stephenson 2007; e.g.) have proposed analyses according to which the truth of claims of the form *P might be the case* or *X is tasty* is relative to *contexts of assessment*. This allows for the following assessor-relativistic alternative to MIGHT-C and TASTY-C:

TASTY-R: An utterance of a sentence of the form *X is tasty* is true relative to a context of assessment if and only if X accords with the standard of taste of that context. (cf. Lasersohn 2005; Stephenson 2007; MacFarlane ms).

MIGHT-R: An utterance of a sentence of the form *P might be the case* is true relative to a context of assessment if and only if P is compatible with the information available in that context (cf. MacFarlane 2011; Egan 2007; Stephenson 2007).¹³

These analyses seem to straightforwardly account for insensitive assessments, given S-ASSESSMENT and given the assumption that, by default, assessors assess truth-values relative to *their* standards of taste or available information.¹⁴ Beth is correct to reject Alice's utterance

that the keys might be in the car by uttering (11), since she has more information available in her context, and she would be wrong to accept Alice's utterance given that information (as revealed by the infelicity of (13)). Alice, on the other hand, was correct to accept her own utterance given the information available to her at the time. (Felicia's assessments of Eduardo's taste-claim can obviously be handled in the same way, *mutatis mutandis*.)

Though assessor-relativism might help us reconcile insensitive assessments with S-ASSESSMENT, it does little in itself to *explain* the phenomenon of felicitous insensitive assessments. Saying that it is part of the semantics of expressions like 'tasty' and 'might' that they contribute to assessor-relative truth-conditions deepens the puzzle rather than solves it: if insensitive assessments are puzzling in the first place, it is even more puzzling that they would become mandated by the conventional meaning of certain expressions.¹⁵

In an attempt to shed light on this issue, John MacFarlane (MacFarlane 2007, 29–30) suggests that some expressions have an assessor-relative semantics to allow for disagreement in areas where there is no objective fact of the matter. We have an interest in sharing standards of taste and epistemic states with those around us, and insensitive assessments, he suggests, might serve the purpose of fostering controversy, thereby prompting coordination of subjective attitudes. But though an interest in coordinating attitudes might indeed be part of the explanation of why there are felicitous insensitive assessments, this does no more than hint at possible explanations. For one, there seem to be significant differences between matters of taste and epistemic matters as to why coordination matters and how it is plausibly achieved. In the case of taste-judgments, it seems that much pressure towards coordination is primarily a matter of social or group pressure, whereas in the case of coordination of might-judgments, it seems to be primarily information-driven. Moreover, unless assessment-relative semantics is more suited for prompting coordination than is standard utterance-relative semantics, this explanation does not even get off the ground. But it is not clear why the relevant social pressures and the relevant exchange of information could not operate without insensitive assessments. Why couldn't coordinative pressures work as well if 'tasty' operated like 'tall', allowing replies involving *sensitive* assessments such

as ‘yes, and they are tasty for me too’ or ‘yes, but they are disgusting by my standards’? (Compare: A: ‘John is tall.’ B: ‘Yes, and tall for a basket ball player too’ or ‘yes, but he is short for basket ball player.’) And why couldn’t the exchange of information leading us to revise our epistemic perspectives work as well with a semantics similarly allowing Beth to felicitously reply to Alice’s ‘the keys might be in the car’ with ‘yes, but they can’t be there’, with ‘can’t’ relating to information available to Beth, or to either Alice or Beth?

Supposing that assessor-relativism could be supplied with a credible explanation of why some locutions contribute to assessor-relative truth-conditions, a remaining worry about the assessor-relativistic strategy is that it requires a radical revision of standard truth-conditional semantics according to which truth-conditions of sentences are determined in contexts of utterance. Partly because of these worries, Kai von Fintel and Anthony Gillies (2011) have proposed what they take to be a less revolutionary way to accommodate insensitive assessments of might-utterances. Their suggestion is that such utterances have indeterminate contexts, underdetermined by facts about the conversation thus far and thus falling short of determining one set of truth-conditions for the sentence. Instead, these utterances ‘put in play’ a ‘cloud’ of determinate contexts and a corresponding set of propositions (with non-relative truth-conditions). Furthermore, von Fintel and Gillies suggest, speakers are justified in uttering might-sentences if they are justified in asserting one of the propositions in that set. Since Alice is justified in asserting that the keys being in the car is compatible with what she knows and since this proposition is one of those put in play as she utters ‘They might be in the car,’ her utterance is justified. The hearer, in turn, can confirm (deny) the utterance if she can confirm (deny) the strongest of the propositions in the set that she is also in a position to deem either true or false. Why the strongest? Because this is what will prove most useful in furthering the goal of the conversation. In the case of Alice and Beth, that goal is to find the keys, and more specifically, after Alice’s utterance, to determine whether they are in the car. For this purpose, it would be most helpful to make known the truth-value of the proposition that *the keys being in the car is compatible with the aggregate of information accessible to either Beth or Alice*. That proposition, von Fintel and Gillies suggest, is also among those put in

play by Alice’s utterance, and after Alice’s utterance, it is something that Beth is arguably in a position to confirm or deny (confirm if her memory does not exclude it; deny if it does).

Like assessor-relativism, ‘cloudy’ contextualism might help us reconcile insensitive assessments with S-ASSESSMENT by changing the way we think about truth-conditions of utterances, but like assessor-relativism it does little to *explain* the phenomenon of felicitous insensitive assessments. As von Fintel and Gillies stress, indeterminacy in what is expressed by utterances is not a surprising phenomenon, but other things in their account call for explanations. Why does the speaker only need to be justified in asserting the weakest of the propositions that are put in play? Why should the speaker be taken to have put in play propositions that she was clearly not warranted in asserting? Shouldn’t charity rule out those readings? And why is the assessor justified in assessing a proposition that the speaker cannot charitably be taken to have asserted? There seems to be no attempt to answer the first three questions and the answer we are offered to the last question is merely the suggestion that the purpose of the conversation makes it more relevant to assess the truth-value of the communal might-proposition, than to assess the truth-value of the solipsistic might-proposition Alice was warranted in asserting. Now, we do think that this particular suggestion points in the right direction, and it is compatible with the explanation that we develop in coming sections. But in itself it hardly even begins to explain the phenomena of felicitous insensitive assessments. Suppose that as Alice and Beth are looking for the keys, Alice calls from one of the two rooms of the apartment:

(21) They are not in here!

There are contexts in which this sentence would be used to express the proposition that the keys are not *in Alice’s room*, and contexts in which it would be used to express the proposition that the keys are not *in the apartment*. Suppose that it is indeterminate what this context is: it is not publicly manifest which proposition Alice meant, or which was conversationally required. Suppose also that Beth has just found the keys in her room and that she is thus in a position to reject the stronger of these propositions. As far as von Fintel and Gillies’ account goes, we should thus expect the following reply to (21) to be felicitous:

(22) ? On the contrary, I just found them in this room.

The fact that it is clearly infelicitous does not in any way show that von Stechow and Gillies' account is mistaken, as they can add further constraints or deny that (21) puts in play the proposition that the keys are not in the apartment. But further constraints would be needed, or an account of when utterances put propositions in play that speakers are not in a position to assert.

Finally, it is unclear whether the 'cloudy' strategy can accommodate the relevant cases. It requires that context or publicly manifested speaker intentions *leave open* that the proposition targeted by felicitous insensitive assessments was expressed by the utterance. However, we have argued that it is publicly manifest that Alice's utterance of 'They might be in the car' does *not* express a communal might-claim. Moreover, even if our conclusion about that case is controversial, the requirement of openness is clearly violated in the case of taste-claims: it is obvious that Eduardo did not intend to assert a proposition implying that the fish sticks accord with Felicia's standard of taste when he uttered 'They are really tasty'. At least, then, it is doubtful that the 'cloudy' strategy would generalize beyond epistemic modals.

Our own strategy for approaching the problem of felicitous insensitive assessments, outlined in Almér & Björnsson (2009), is instead to reject S-ASSESSMENT, and substitute for it a version that takes the conditions whose satisfaction is assessed when we assess utterances to depend on the context of assessment:

C-ASSESSMENT: When we assess assertive utterances using various assessment phrases, we normally, (barring confusion, misunderstanding, etc) assess the satisfaction of the conditions that are made most immediately salient by the utterances *as we assess them*.

In most cases, the truth-conditions of utterances are indeed made most salient, but in cases allowing for felicitous insensitive assessments, thinking about the utterance in the context of assessment makes some other conditions more salient than the truth-conditions of the utterance. When Felicia assesses Eduardo's utterance of 'fish sticks are tasty', the condition made most salient by Eduardo's utterance is that fish sticks accord with *Felicia's* palate; when Beth assesses Alice's assertoric utterance of

'the keys might be in the car', the condition made most salient by her utterance in Beth's context of assessment is the condition that the key's being in the car is compatible with the aggregate of information had by either Alice or Beth, or perhaps just that had by Beth.¹⁶

The suggestion that we can felicitously assess an utterance as true or false without assessing the truth-conditions of that utterance might seem incoherent. But this incoherence goes away once we distinguish between the truth-conditions that do serious work in semantic theory and everyday assessments of truth and falsity that, everyone should agree, might be governed by considerations pulling in a different direction than the semanticist's theoretical needs. As semanticists, we should say that Eduardo's utterance of 'fish sticks are tasty' is true, or expresses a proposition that is true, if and only if the fish sticks accord with his palate, because this makes best sense of the production and successful uptake of the utterance, capturing the conditions that governed Eduardo's judgment and choice of words as well as conditions involved in hearers' understanding of the utterance. But Felicia's assessment, we want to argue, is not an attempt to contribute to semantic theory, and is governed by pragmatic considerations in the light of which the utterance makes a different condition salient.

Another worry about the intelligibility of C-ASSESSMENT stems from the fact that the existence of a semantic assessment already presupposes an object of assessment, i.e. a condition the satisfaction of which is being assessed. Consequently, there can be no assessment before there is such an object, and thus no place for the assessment to be part of what pragmatically determines that object.¹⁷ However, what can be determined pragmatically is whether an utterance will be understood as the *conversational target* of an assessment directed at certain satisfaction conditions. Eduardo's utterance ('They are really tasty!') prompts Felicia to assess the condition that fish sticks accord with Felicia's taste, and this assessment is intuitively understood as targeting Eduardo's utterance because this condition is the one made most immediately salient by the utterance when Felicia is making the assessment. Because of this, she can naturally express the assessment as an assessment of the utterance, uttering 'No, they are too bland' as a direct response.

Finally, it might also seem that the appeal to C-ASSESSMENT immediately runs foul of cases where the target of felicitous insensitive assessments are fixed not just by being the preceding utterance, but with the help of definite descriptions such as ‘what he said’ and ‘the proposition he asserted’:

(23) Eduardo: The fish sticks are very tasty!

(24) Felicia: What he said is true. They are fantastic!

(25) Felicia: The proposition he asserted is true. They are fantastic!

The most obvious problem with this objection is that the referent of ‘what he said’ is equally affected by pragmatic considerations. It is well known that the expression can pick out, at the very least, the words used, the ‘literal’ meaning of the sentence, and the speaker meaning of the utterance. As long as ‘what he said’ in (24) does not pick out the proposition expressed by Eduardo in (23), the felicity of (24) provides no direct problem for an account resting on C-ASSESSMENT. ‘The proposition he asserted’, on the other hand, is technical jargon, unlikely to pick out anything determinate outside of semantic theory and thus unsuitable for eliciting theoretically unbiased linguistic intuitions. Moreover, even if either of these expressions managed to pick out the proposition asserted by Eduardo, the predication of truth might itself be a matter of metonymy, attributing truth to a proposition suitably related to the proposition picked out by the expression, just as ‘I’m parked out back’ attributes *being parked out back* to an entity suitably related to the speaker (though the former case would be much more subtle, as the two propositions are much more similar than a car and its owner).

Of course, for an appeal to pragmatic considerations to help us explain felicitous insensitive assessments, we need to say something substantial about what those pragmatic considerations are, just as the appeal to assessor-relative truth-conditions or clouds of propositions put in play by utterances tells us little without explanations that remain to be supplied. In whatever way one wants to accommodate felicitous insensitive assessments, one needs further explanatory work, and one needs to be able to explain why certain locutions and conversational contexts invite or demand these assessments. In what follows,

we will supply pragmatic explanations that are easily combined with C-ASSESSMENT.¹⁸ Much of what we say can probably be adapted to the other two frameworks considered in this section, but before closing we will suggest that ours provide the better fit with the data we consider.

6. A FIRST, TRIVIAL, STEP: PRAGMATICS CAN AFFECT THE FELICITY OF INSENSITIVE ASSESSMENT

Generally speaking, we should expect assessments of utterances or judgments to target the propositions expressed or endorsed, for the reasons spelled out in section 4. But the point of departure for the explanations that we are about to propose is that the proposition targeted by expressions of assessment can be affected by pragmatic considerations: what proposition ‘no’ rejects and ‘yes’ or ‘that’s true’ confirms can depend not only on the proposition expressed or asserted just before. Before we consider how and why this phenomenon is instantiated by insensitive assessments of taste-claims and might-claims in later sections, it is helpful to look at some less controversial examples. First, consider (27) as a possible reply to (26), uttered during a search for Beth’s keys:

(26) A: I wonder if the keys are in the car.

(27) B: No, Beth has them in her pocket.

‘No’ in (27) is perfectly natural, though it clearly targets a proposition other than the proposition asserted by a previous utterance. However, it is only natural when what is at issue is the whereabouts of the keys.¹⁹ Things would be different if (26) were preceded by:

(28) C: Who wonders if the keys are in the car?

Now (27) would seem ill-placed, at cross-purpose with the conversation. Instead, it could be natural for B to let “no” target the proposition asserted in (26):

(29) B: No you don’t, you know that Beth has them in her pocket.

On the other hand, (29) would be infelicitous as a reply to (26) in its original setting. Apparently, what is plausibly at issue as the assessment is made affects our understanding of the target of the assessment.

When (27) fails to target the proposition asserted in (26), it nevertheless targets a proposition expressed by that sentence. In other cases, we get similar shifts, but seemingly to propositions that were not explicitly expressed by the original utterance:

(30) A: I couldn't believe how tall Kiel was.

(31) B: No, it was almost freakish.

(32) B: ? No, you couldn't.

Here, (31) seems perfectly natural, but 'no' seems to mirror the negation in (30), negating the proposition that B could believe how tall Kiel was, a proposition not expressed or conversationally implied by (30). By negating that proposition, 'no' expresses disbelief on B's part mirroring that just expressed by A, thus contributing to a general human interest in comparing and confirming attitudes, and thus to an intelligible and expected conversational goal (cf. Björnsson & Finlay 2010, 19–20). Again, we can see that the naturalness of (31) and the inappropriateness of (32) depend on what is at issue in the conversation at the time: in a conversation where A is asked by suspicious interrogators about his reaction to Kiel, B might help confirm the reaction reported in (30) by uttering (32).

Though we take these examples involving attitude reports to exemplify pragmatic considerations of just the sorts that we also take to explain felicitous insensitive assessments of taste- and might-claims, we do not deny that there seem to be some clear and important differences. One such difference is also our reason to use these cases for illustration: here it is *clear* that the assessment targets conditions other than those that the speaker was concerned to get across as true, whereas the cases of felicitous insensitive assessments that we discussed in sections 2 and 3 were considerably more subtle. In section 8, we suggest an explanation of those differences; here our concern has merely been to introduce the general phenomenon. We now turn to the pragmatics of assessments of taste-judgments.

7. ASSESSING JUDGMENTS OF PERSONAL TASTE

Two pragmatic factors seem to be at play in typical contexts where people make judgments to the effect that some item accords (or does

not accord) with their own taste. First, potential assessors of such judgments are unlikely to be in a better position to determine their correctness than was the original speaker's. Since assessments from manifestly inferior epistemic positions are unlikely to be conversationally appropriate, we should expect a (defeasible) presumption against sensitive assessments of such judgments. Second, just as people take a great deal of interest in similarities and differences in attitudes, they typically find comparisons of personal taste interesting in ways that, say, comparisons of an object's distance to other objects chosen at random are not. This provides a general (defeasible) reason in favour of interpreting utterances in ways that take them to contribute to such comparisons.

We suggest that because of these two factors, there is a default pragmatic pressure towards the sort of shift that we saw in (31) above. There, an interest in comparisons of attitudes focused the assessment on a proposition ascribing an attitude to the assessor rather than on an expressed proposition ascribing the same attitude to the original speaker. Similarly, in accepting or rejecting a prior taste-claim, people can be expected to express acceptance or rejection of a corresponding proposition that relates to their own standard of taste rather than that of the original speaker.

The last claim should not be controversial: everyone should agree that this is at least part of what we do on such occasions. When Eduardo has claimed that the fish sticks are tasty and Felicia replies 'No, they are too bland,' there is no doubt that she has thereby let her audience know that the fish sticks do not accord with her taste.

The substantial claim, instead, is that this is explained by the above pragmatic considerations. If this claim is correct, we should expect changes in these pragmatic factors to make insensitive assessments less natural. Two sorts of changes are relevant: those that make comparisons less interesting and those that make speaker authority less of a problem. Comparisons become less interesting when (a) it is already manifest what the assessor's standard of taste says about the item in question and (b) there is some other point to assessing a prior taste-claim. Speaker authority becomes less of a problem if (c) the act of assessment does not purport to bring to bear independent epistemic authority or if (d) the speaker's access to the object of his taste-judgment

is less direct than immediate experience, such that there is a significant space for error.

What follows is an example involving (a), (b) and (c). The interest in taste comparisons is reduced by letting speaker and assessor belong to species that have manifestly radically different food preferences. The assessment is offered as a way of *acknowledging* the prior taste-judgment, and acknowledgements do not require independent epistemic authority. Moreover, the taste-claim is acknowledged by way of preparing for a comment on its relevance for a conversationally pertinent purpose made salient by that comment:

(33) Vinnie the Vulture: This rotten lamb is truly delicious.

(34) We: Yes Vinnie, but too much will make you drowsy.²⁰

It is easy to imagine a context where the confirming assessment of Vinnie's utterance does not seem to express that the rotten lamb accords with our taste.

The next case involves (d) instead of (c): the assessor has better epistemic access to the object of judgment than the speaker. Again, the parties of the conversation are dissimilar enough for comparisons of taste to seem less tempting, and the correction of a mistake on the part of the speaker provides a conversational interest other than taste comparison:

(35) Little Dana: The sauce looks yummy!²¹

(36) Parent: No, Dana, it is too spicy.

The parent's reply is easily understood as relating to Dana's palate, not to the parent's.

These and other cases seem to support the pragmatic explanation: when we neutralize the two pragmatic factors that we have suggested explain felicitous insensitive assessments of judgments of personal taste, sensitive assessments become perfectly natural.²²

Similar considerations seem to apply to other predicates of personal taste ('fun', 'boring', 'bland', 'disgusting', 'delicious'), but they are notably absent in much other discourse about relative or perspective dependent matters. Consider, for example, claims about whether something is to the right or to the left, claims made true or false by facts

about how things are located relative to some contextually determined spatially oriented perspective. Here it is clear that speakers do not in general have the same sort of privileged access to such facts as they typically have in the case of judgments of personal taste. There is thus no general presumption against sensitive assessments. It is also clear that we have no general interest in comparing how an object relates to one perspective to how it relates to a different perspective, but instead a general interest in locating objects in a spatial framework that is independent of particular spatial frameworks. Not only are the factors that direct assessments of judgments of personal taste away from the proposition endorsed to an assessor-relating proposition absent in such cases, but also our basic interests in these matters call for sensitive assessments. Given this, and given a general presumption that assessments are sensitive, we should not expect felicitous insensitive assessments of right/left claims. The same is true about, e.g. pronouns: even in the case of the first person singular, we have no general expectation of speaker authority, and our general interest in comparing properties of different individuals picked out by the same pronoun as the conversation unfolds do not come close to our interest in comparing attitudes or taste preferences.

8. EXPLICIT RELATIVIZATION

Many have pointed out that explicit relativizations of judgments of taste to the speaker's standard block insensitive assessments (see e.g. Stephenson 2007 492–493; MacFarlane 2007, 29–30):

(37) A: This is super tasty for someone with my palate.

(38) B: No, it is too bland.

Here, 'no' in (38) either seems sensitive to the concern of A (in which case we might wonder what grounds B had for thinking that A was mistaken), or else seems inappropriately insensitive, strongly inviting a reply like

(39) A: I didn't say you would like it; I said that someone with my taste would.

This is not surprising given the pragmatic explanations suggested above. Given that we generally assume that taste-claims are made relative to the speaker's standard of taste, the explicit relativization serves to focus conversational interest specifically to this relative standard, thus reigning in our general interests in comparing taste. Perhaps equally important is that a sentence with an explicit relativizing phrase makes more salient the relation to the speaker's palate as we consider an assessment of the utterance. Given C-ASSESSMENT, we can expect this to prevent insensitive assessments.

Similar considerations explain why implicatures are not in general naturally taken as targets of assessments, even when the speaker might be in a clear position of authority regarding the truth-conditions of the sentence and even when assessing the implicature would be conversationally relevant. Suppose that, in assessing a PhD candidate, I say:

(40) Jane has excellent handwriting and is very punctual.

I might be in a position of authority regarding what is explicitly said here, and it might be conversationally appropriate for you to take issue with my implicated assessment of Jane's qualities as a philosopher. Nevertheless, "no" in the following does not naturally seem to target the implicature that Jane lacks philosophical important qualities:

(41) No, she is an excellent philosopher.

The reason, we suggest, is two-fold: not only does the implicature have to compete with the invariant contents of the expressions in (40), having to do with satisfying standards of handwriting and punctuality, but we appreciate the implicature only by grasping these contents and the resulting explicit message.²³

Finally, we take similar considerations to explain why felicitous insensitive assessments of attitude reports of the sort discussed in section 6 are more obviously insensitive than standard insensitive assessments of taste-claims. The former ignore the invariant contents of some of the expressions in the targeted utterances, such as the contents of the embedding attitude clause ('I wonder if...'), or ignore the referent of a contextually sensitive expression not itself subject to the pragmatic considerations that prompt insensitive assessments ('I couldn't believe...').

9. ACCUSATIONS AND INSENSITIVE ASSESSMENTS

We have already noted that some assessment phrases seem to block felicitous insensitive assessments. For example:

(42) Eduardo: The fish sticks are really tasty!

(43) Felicia: No, they are too bland!

(44) Felicia: That's true, they are delicious!

(45) Felicia: That's false. They are too bland!

(46) Felicia: He is mistaken. They are too bland!

We have argued that Felicia's replies in (43) and (44) can express felicitous insensitive assessments of Eduardo's claim. But it seems, at least to our ears, that in (45) and (46) Felicia either presupposes that Eduardo doesn't know how the fish sticks taste to him, or that Eduardo intended his claim to relate to standards transcending his personal taste. Either way, we are strongly inclined to understand the assessment as a sensitive one.

We propose an explanation of why 'that's false' goes badly with insensitive assessments that builds on Andy Egan's (2007: 4n) explanation of why 'false' is inappropriate for insensitive assessments of might-claims. Egan points out that to say that someone said something 'false' is to attribute some rational or epistemic error. Since insensitive assessments can be felicitous even though the target utterance isn't based on any error, the use of 'false' is inappropriate. We think that this is almost right. With Egan, we think that saying that someone is 'mistaken' or has said something 'false' is often understood as an *accusation* of either erroneous reasoning or lack of honesty. Accusations of erroneous reasoning call attention to the concerns and processes leading the accused to his judgment, and accusations of lacking honesty need to relate to the concerns of the speaker in order to be fair. Since accusations of either kind need to relate to speaker concerns, they cannot be insensitive assessments. Given the interpretive assumption that Felicia's assessments in (45) and (46) are conversationally appropriate, they thus have to be understood as attempts at sensitive assessments.²⁴

10. DISAGREEMENT

Though our primary concern here is insensitive assessments, this issue is intimately connected to issues of disagreement through the following link: it is natural to say that A disagrees with B when A felicitously rejects something that B has said, or when A has a view such that A *could* felicitously reject some judgment of B's. In either of these senses, Felicia seems to disagree with Eduardo when he says that the fish sticks are tasty.²⁵

Because of this, our pragmatic explanation of why taste-claims allow for and sometimes require insensitive assessments also explains the existence of so-called 'faultless disagreement' (Kölbel 2004; 2009). Felicia can disagree with Eduardo without either having committed any mistake *relative to their own concerns* because Felicia's rejection can target a different proposition, or different truth-conditions, than Eduardo's taste-judgment.

One might ask, though, what the *object* of such a disagreement is. Intuitively, Eduardo and Felicia disagree about whether *the fish sticks are tasty*, but 'the fish sticks are tasty' expresses no proposition (in the sense we use 'proposition' here) unless related to some standard of taste or other. The minimal answer, that we think everyone should agree upon, is that when we talk of the object of disagreement here, we abstract away from the propositions that concern the parties: the object of disagreement is such that when it is supplied with relevant standards of taste, it yields the full propositions that the parties are concerned to reject or affirm. (Such abstractions are of course commonplace, as when we say that 'everyone got something tasty', meaning that each relevant individual got something tasty for that individual, or when we say that Billy and Bob both wear shoes that are too small, meaning that each wears shoes too small for him.)²⁶

11. SOLVING THE PUZZLE OF INSENSITIVE ASSESSMENTS

Assuming that these explanations are correct, we have the beginnings of a solution to the puzzle of insensitive assessments. We have an explanation of why assessments need not be directed at the propositions that the speaker accepted and wanted to communicate, even though

grasping those very propositions should be part of the process of understanding the speaker. What happens in cases of felicitous insensitive assessments is not that these propositions are not being assessed, but rather that their assessment is conversationally irrelevant. We also have a solution to the socially puzzling aspects of insensitive assessments: since such assessments carry no accusatory elements, there is no unfairness involved. Finally, we have an explanation of why some locutions—predicates of personal taste—invite insensitive assessments and an explanation of why others—'right/left', personal pronouns—do not. It is easy to see how the latter, negative, explanation extends to numerous other locutions that convey relations to objects determined by the context of utterance, such as 'it's raining' (where and when?), 'a local X' (local relative to what location?) or 'X is ready' (to do what?). In what follows, we will say something about how the former, positive, explanation extends to might-claims and beyond.

12. ASSESSING EPISTEMIC MODALS

Solipsistic might-claims share one important pragmatic property with subjective taste-claims: hearers are rarely in a position to assess the proposition the truth of which the speaker was concerned to get right and communicate to the hearer, except on the basis of the speaker's authority. As in the case of subjective taste-claims, hearers are therefore rarely in a situation in which it would be conversationally appropriate to voice such assessments. But another pragmatic property is equally important in blocking hearer's sensitive assessments of might-claims. As noted in section 3, the central cognitive role of judgments to the effect that some proposition P might be the case, and the central conversational purpose of claims to the same effect, is to guide strategies of uncertainty relative to P: to direct the way we search for more evidence for or against P; hedge our bets and direct our contingency planning. Since we want to guide these strategies by as much relevant information as is feasible, the fact that P is compatible with a *subset* of the relevant information we can feasibly take into account is irrelevant for this purpose. If Beth knows something that rules out that the keys are in the car, the fact that information accessible to *Alice* does not rule this out is irrelevant to Beth's search for the keys, and once she gives

Alice access to this further information, the proposition becomes irrelevant for Alice's search too. What would be highly relevant, however, is confirmation or denial of the communal proposition that information accessible to either Alice or Beth fails to rule out that the keys are in the car.

Recall the dialogue in *Lost Keys*, with Beth's two alternative replies to Alice:

(47) Alice: The keys might be in the car.

(48) Beth: No, they can't be. I still had them when I came in.

(49) Beth: Yes, you're right, they might be. I'll go look.

The suggestion now is that pragmatic considerations governing our typical interest in might propositions and might facts lead us to understand Beth's assessments in (48) and (49) as concerned with the communal proposition, just as the pragmatic considerations associated with tasty-claims led us to understand Felicia's assessments as concerned with conformity to her standards of taste.²⁷

If this is right, contextual changes manipulating these pragmatic considerations should make insensitive assessments less natural, just as they did in the case of subjective taste-claims. To avoid the effect of speaker authority, we can either (a) let it be manifest to the hearer what information the speaker has when making a solipsistic might-claim, (b) let the assessment target a might-claim made relative to information other than that available to the speaker, such as a communal claim or one made relative to information available to someone else entirely or (c) let the assessment be one that does not purport to carry authority independent of that of the speaker. To avoid the problem that epistemic strategies favour might-claims relating to the most expansive set of relevant information that can feasibly be processed, we need contexts where it is manifest that the assessor's role is not to help guide epistemic strategies in the best way possible. For example, the assessor might be in the business of (d) assessing the rationality of an action, (e) explaining an action, or (f) guiding the original speaker's epistemic actions only relative to information available to the speaker. Let us just use two cases that illustrate these effects. The first employs (a) and (f). It involves a dialogue between a participant in a game show who

will win the prize if correctly guessing behind which of ten doors it is located, and the host, who knows that the prize is behind door 3:

(50) Participant, concluding a chain of reasoning: So the prize might be behind door 2?

(51) Host: Yes.

(52) (52) Host: No, you have ruled out door 2, but it might be behind either 3 or 10.²⁸

It is easy to imagine a context where the host is not expected to provide participants with further information, but might help them use that information. In such a context, the participant's question relates to information available to her and not to the host's inside knowledge, and the host's assessments are best understood as sensitively relating to the very same information.

The second case involves (c) and (e). Here is Alice again, this time on the phone:

(53) When Beth realized that she might have left her keys in the car, she rushed out through the ice-cold rain to check. But just a moment later, I found the keys here under the groceries. She will not be happy when she comes back all soaked.

To say that someone *realizes* that P implies that P, so the first sentence of (53) implies a positive assessment of Beth's thought that she might have left the keys in the car. The assessment is made as part of an explanation of Beth's behaviour and thus implies no independent authority regarding the truth of the proposition that Beth accepted. As predicted, we naturally understand it as made relative to information had by Beth (or Beth and Alice) at the time, not relative to information had by Alice now.²⁹

What we see in these and other examples is that sensitive assessments become the norm when we remove the pragmatic factors that otherwise block such assessments and make relevant assessments of the propositions targeted by insensitive assessments. In this way, insensitive assessments of might-judgments behave very much like insensitive assessments of taste-claims.³⁰

13. INSENSITIVE ASSESSMENTS IN OTHER AREAS

This section has two objectives. The first is to make plausible that the pragmatic factors at work in the case of ‘tasty’ and ‘might’ have analogies in other areas where people have suggested assessor-relativistic accounts of intuitions about insensitive assessments and disagreement. The second is to suggest further areas in which we should expect similar pragmatic considerations to apply. We begin with the first, looking at *conditionals*, *ought-claims* and *gradable adjectives*. Though each of these three areas merit more space than we can give them here, our hope is to indicate *the sort* of pragmatic considerations that they raise.

Ought-Claims: In response to Niko Kolodny and John MacFarlane’s (ms) intriguing case for an assessor-relativistic analysis of ought-claims, Björnsson & Finlay (2010) argue that such claims give rise to felicitous insensitive assessments for much the same pragmatic reasons that we have argued applies to might-claims. Since people often ask what they ought to do under conditions of uncertainty, the concerns behind ought-claims frequently relate to limited bodies of information. Moreover, the purpose of such claims, like that of might-claims, is to guide strategies for dealing appropriately with uncertainty, allowing us to take into considerations both risks and promises. In the previous section, we suggested that for this purpose it is pointless to assess propositions relating to bodies of information that exclude accessible relevant information. It was this pragmatic privileging of propositions that take more information into account that favoured insensitive assessments. Björnsson and Finlay make the same argument for ought propositions.

Conditionals: The considerations at work in the case of might-claims also seem to be at play in the case of conditionals, where Brian Weatherston (2009) has recently argued for an assessor-relativistic analysis. One of the striking features of indicative conditionals is that people in different epistemic circumstances can be fully justified in accepting conditionals that are, in a way, conflicting. Suppose that, unknown to each other, Aaron and Basil are both trying to locate a treasure. Both know that it is in one of three chests, A, B and C, spread out on a tropical island. Aaron has located C and, looking through a hole in its lid, concluded that it is empty. He says to himself:

(54) If the treasure isn’t in A, it’s in B.

At the same time, Basil located B, finding it empty. He says to himself:

(55) If the treasure isn’t in A, it’s in C.

It is clear that Aaron and Basil are perfectly justified in making their respective claims, given the information they have. Moreover, their lack of further information does not seem to in any way undermine their claims.³¹ This strongly suggests that speaker concerns in making conditional claims are relative to their epistemic contexts.

A number of people have suggested contextualist analyses to account for this, analyses according to which the truth-conditions of indicative conditionals depend on what bodies of information are relevant in the context of utterance.³² As Brian Weatherston has pointed out, however, it seems that two people can agree that *if P, Q* without first making sure that they have the same information in mind (Weatherston 2009, 349–351; cf. Bennett 2003, ch. 6). Suppose, for example, that Curly, the pirate that hid the treasure, knows that she put it in a chest marked either ‘A’ or ‘B’ but that she cannot tell which because the letter was partially covered in dust. Suppose further that Curly hears Aaron utter (54): ‘If the treasure isn’t in A, it’s in B.’ It now seems that Curly is in a position to reply

(56) That’s true.

even though she has no clear idea what information Aaron was relating to when uttering his conditional. Since Aaron’s concern in uttering (54) was relative to his epistemic position, (56) would be insensitive to that concern.³³

Weatherston takes this to support an assessor-relativistic account, but our question is whether the pragmatic explanations proposed thus far extends to (56) and other insensitive assessments of indicative conditionals. It seems that they do. Simplifying somewhat, the overall purpose of conditional claims (of the sort we are concerned with) is to guide hypothetical reasoning, primarily inferences from P to Q, secondarily from $\sim Q$ to $\sim P$. Both Aaron and Curly have information which guarantees that inferring that the treasure is in B given that it is not in A

or inferring that it is in A given that it is not in B will yield true conclusions. Relative to the purpose of guiding such inferences, differences in bodies of information that support the inferences will typically be relatively insignificant. If what Curly knows guarantees that her inferences would be truth-preserving, it also guarantees that Aaron's would be. Consequently, for Curly to convey that she has such knowledge is highly relevant for Aaron's inferential concerns, giving further support to his inferential disposition, whereas determining whether Aaron really has such knowledge is less likely to be helpful.

These considerations seem to match those at work in the case of taste- and might-claims. Moreover, their role seems confirmed as their absence favours *sensitive* assessments. Suppose that Aaron and Basil are participants in a televised game show where the host, Drusilla, knows what information they have, and also that the treasure is in fact in A. She would not herself think that if the treasure is not in A it is in B, nor that if it is not in A it is in C; if anything, she would be inclined to think that if the treasure is not in A after all, some executive must have taken off with it: this is the inference supported by the body of information that is relevant for her inferential concerns.³⁴ Nevertheless, it is easy to see how she can be in a position to either confirm the participants' reasoning ('Yes Aaron, if it's not in A, it's in B') or use factives to explain their actions to the viewers ('Basil's strategy changed when he realized that if the treasure is not in A, it's in C'). At least at a first glance, then, insensitive assessments of conditionals seem to have pragmatic explanations similar to those pertaining to assessments of might-claims.

Gradable adjectives: The next class of expressions that seem to allow for insensitive assessments and thus invite assessor-relativistic analyses is that of adjectives that have comparative and superlative forms: 'rich', 'long', 'dirty', 'big', etc. Such adjectives can be used to ascribe quite different properties to objects in different contexts. For example, the relevant comparison class clearly matters: thinking that someone is rich *for a kid* is different from thinking that she is rich *for a New Yorker*, say, and speakers might have different comparison classes in mind in different contexts when they say that someone is rich. Less obviously, speakers might require different degrees of deviation from the mean or

approximation to the extreme. Generally speaking, when it is said that someone is rich, it seems that the speaker is concerned to express a proposition to the effect that the person is above a certain cut-off point on a scale of richness determined by a relevant comparison class. As Mark Richard (2003; 2008) has pointed out, however, intuitions about disagreement seem to be somewhat insensitive to these concerns. Suppose Mary has won a million dollar lottery. Didi is impressed and tells a friend:

(57) Mary's rich.

In a different conversation, Naomi, who is not impressed, remarks:

(58) Mary won the lottery, but she still isn't rich.

Suppose that '[e]ach conversation began with the observation that some wealthy person doesn't deserve to be rich, and each of the women is now idly assessing people as rich or otherwise, and then assessing whether the rich ones deserve their wealth (Richard 2003, 218)'. Suppose further that although both Didi and Naomi compared Mary's wealth to that of other New Yorkers, they differ in *how* well they think that someone needs to do in this comparison to count as rich. If so, they have different concerns when judging whether people are rich or not. But as Richard says, we would nevertheless naturally think of Mary and Didi as *disagreeing* about whether Mary is rich. If they were part of the same conversation, it also seems that Naomi could naturally respond to Didi by saying

(59) No, Mary's not rich.

Richard thinks that this demands amendments to contextualist analyses of gradable adjectives, but he also provides the key ingredients for a pragmatic explanation of this apparently insensitive assessment. Disagreements about the application of gradable adjectives seem to open up for insensitive assessments in contexts where something hinges upon where we put the cut-off. In the case at hand, Didi has her cut-off points set such that those who count as rich have a wealth that impresses her, and the same goes for Naomi. Given this, judgments about whether someone is rich becomes expressive of their attitudes in much the same way that taste-judgments are. In another case, a disagreement about whether a shirt counts as *dirty* might have consequences

for whether it goes to the dry cleaners or will still be worn (Richard 2003, 220).

When attitudes or practical concerns thus set the cut-off points for gradable adjectives, a hearer's sensitive agreements would leave one important issue untouched: the hearer would not yet have expressed her own attitude, or weighed in on whether the shirt has collected enough dirt to go to the dry cleaners. Moreover, the hearer will seldom be better placed than the speaker to determine whether the object in question makes the speaker's cut-off point; this makes the sensitive assessment conversationally inappropriate. Since these pragmatic considerations are clearly analogous to those that we have argued are driving insensitive assessments of taste- and might-claims, it seems likely that similar mechanisms are at work here.

If pragmatic considerations of the sort that explain insensitive assessments elsewhere extend to gradable adjectives, we should expect them to extend to any term whose extension is to some extent determined contextually in flexible ways. In the right context, we should expect attitudes and practical concerns to determine the relevant extensions, just as in the case of 'rich' and 'dirty', thus making insensitive assessments with the corresponding expressive or practical purpose conversationally relevant and sensitive assessments ignoring that purpose irrelevant. Moreover, we should typically expect hearers to know how those concerns set the exact extension in particular uses of the term primarily through its application. This creates a presumption of speaker authority when the application of the term depends on that exact setting, thus making sensitive assessments conversationally inappropriate.

Since natural language displays a wide array of vagueness and indeterminacy that is resolved contextually, a great number of terms thus have the potential to be subject to felicitous insensitive assessments, including most kind terms as well as terms like 'here' and 'to the right'. Compared to taste-claims, might-claims and conditionals, most other claims are less strongly tied to specific conversational purposes that can provide the relevant conversational constraints. We might thus expect them to allow for insensitive assessments only in settings providing the relevant conversational purposes. But such settings do not seem too hard to find. The following two exchanges, it seems to us, can be naturally understood to involve insensitive assessments, where

speaker and assessor understand 'boy' and 'here' differently:

(60) A: He is a boy!

(61) B: No, he is not. He is old enough to take responsibility for his actions.

(62) C to D: And you know the Hendersons; they live here too!

(63) E to C and D: No they don't, they live on the other side of the tracks. Big difference!

Finally, there are whole classes of expressions that we have not mentioned, and that seem to carry a strong presumption of practical conversational purpose: normative terms like 'right', 'wrong', 'correct' and 'incorrect', evaluatives like 'good', 'bad', 'awesome' and 'disastrous', and more generally terms with positive or negative connotations. If these terms relate flexibly to different standards or goals in different contexts, we should expect them too to give rise to insensitive assessments. If this is correct, it would be of considerable importance for metaethics, where it is often held against contextualist accounts of normative and evaluative claims that people do not display sensitivity to differences in speaker concerns when assessing such claims. Given the sort of explanations we have proposed for insensitive assessments, however, such insensitivity might be just what we should expect.³⁵

14. INSENSITIVE ASSESSMENTS: PRAGMATICS OR SEMANTICS

In this paper, we have argued that taste- and might-judgments allow for and sometimes require felicitous insensitive assessments, that felicitous insensitive assessments are puzzling, and that three ways of making room for such assessments—assessor-relativistic analyses, cloudy contextualism and C-ASSESSMENT—do very little in themselves to solve the puzzle. We have also argued that there are plausible pragmatic explanations of why certain expressions invite insensitive assessments. Pragmatic factors are without doubt at work when assessments of attitude reports either target the propositional objects of attitudes rather than the reports themselves or express corresponding attitudes of the

assessor, and we have shown how manipulation of significant pragmatic factors affect the availability of insensitive assessments of both taste-claims and epistemic modals. Finally, we have suggested that these explanations extend to other areas where insensitive assessments have been thought to raise problems for contextualist analyses. Before closing, we want to suggest that if these explanations are correct, insensitive assessments are best understood, not in terms of targets of such assessments having assessor-relative truth-conditions or putting in play clouds of propositions, but in terms of the pragmatics of assessments.

Here is the argument, in brief. First of all, everyone needs to account for production and uptake of sentences using various locutions: everyone needs an account of why speakers use certain words for certain communicative purposes, and a corresponding account of how hearers understand their utterances. The existence of felicitous insensitive assessments does not in any straightforward way suggest that otherwise tempting contextualist analyses are incapable of filling *this* role, as such assessments occur after the hearer has understood the utterance. Second, although it could have been that in order for these further acts to be intelligible, the truth-conditions of the target utterances would have to be assessor-relative, the pragmatic explanations provided here suggest that no such assessor-relativism is needed. What is needed, it seems, is merely (a) that language lets assessments of beliefs or utterances target propositions other than those judged true by the believer or expressed by the speaker, and (b) that pragmatic considerations make sensitive assessments conversationally inappropriate while making insensitive assessments relevant. Finally, we have seen no real evidence suggesting that the utterance must somehow have ‘put in play’ the proposition targeted by the insensitive assessment. On the contrary, Felicia might have understood full well that Eduardo expressed a proposition concerned with his taste, not with hers, and would nevertheless be in a position to make felicitous insensitive assessments. The conservative assumption at this stage, therefore, is that felicitous insensitive assessments are accounted for by familiar contextualist analyses tracking (publicly manifest) speaker concerns, C-ASSESSMENT, and the pragmatics of assessments.

Notes

¹We thank audiences in Stockholm, Lisbon, London, Aberdeen, Riga and Oslo for valuable comments on talks based on earlier versions of this paper, with a special mention of Barry Smith, Derek Ball and Nick Allott. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers for prompting a number of useful clarifications. Finally, Steve Finlay’s collaboration with one of us (Björnsson) on related issues in Björnsson & Finlay (2010) while we were working on this paper has sharpened our thinking about the issues in more ways than we can count.

²The analysis is partial because it does not tell us how to generalize to questions, embedded occurrences of ‘X is tasty’ or explicitly relativized taste-claims (‘X is tasty to Y’). We stick to this partial analysis as our focus will be on unembedded, unqualified cases, and as it lets us stay neutral between views taking the relevant standard to be part of the semantic content of the utterance, those taking it to be part of the circumstances of evaluation (what MacFarlane (2009) calls ‘non-indexical contextualism’), and those taking it to be a pragmatically implied content (cf. Bach 2011). One might have different views about what makes a standard of taste relevant in the context of utterance: speaker intentions, publicly manifested speaker intentions, accessibility of interpretations given what is at issue in the context, and so forth. Any full analysis of ‘tasty’ will have to take a stance on this, but our concern here is not to provide such an analysis: the phenomenon that concerns us is a puzzling mismatch in speaker and assessor concerns, and this phenomenon remains whether or not the semantics of taste-claims is determined by speaker intentions. Moreover, the examples of felicitous insensitive assessments that we will consider are meant to be ones where these things coincide: speaker intentions and concerns are publicly accessible and relevant to the issue in the context. Notice, though, that contextualist analyses should not take the relevant form of contextual determination of standards of taste to closely match that of paradigmatic indexicals. Consider the following dialogue involving the indexical ‘here’, which seems perfectly natural when A and B are in different places: A: ‘They are here.’ B: ? ‘Yes, but they are not here; that’s the problem.’ Contrast this with: A: ‘They are tasty.’ B: ‘Yes, but they are not tasty: that’s the problem.’ B’s reply strikes us as contradictory, but it wouldn’t be if ‘yes’ denied A’s statement and B’s ‘tasty’ related to a different standard of taste than that of A’s. However, ‘tasty’ is not alone among contextually sensitive expressions to depart from the pattern of paradigmatic indexicals. Consider, for example, a dialogue involving ‘X is early’, which seems to express that X is early in relation to some contextually relevant time: A: ‘John is early.’ B: ‘Yes, but he isn’t early; that’s the problem.’ Apparently, ‘early’, like ‘tasty’, resists changes of contextually determined parameter within one utterance in a way that ‘here’ does not. In this paper, we focus on speaker concerns, but there are other sources of evidence for contextualism. Schaffer (2011) argues that ‘tasty’ and ‘fun’ are two-place predicates making covert reference to an experiencer, appealing to binding (‘everyone_i got something tasty [to x_i]’), control of subjects of infinitival clauses (‘It is fun [for x_i] [PRO_i to dance]’), and limitations on collection (‘Lisa and Homer have agreed that *Mousehead* is tasty’ does not seem natural in all cases where both Lisa and Homer have both sincerely uttered ‘*Mousehead* is tasty’ with co-referential instances of ‘*Mousehead*’). For related evidence, see Stephenson (2007: 489–491) on the behaviour of epistemic modals and predicates of personal taste in attitude reports. We do not take a stand here on whether assessor-relativist accounts of the sort discussed later can account

for this evidence, or whether this sort of argument over-generalizes.

³For arguments that there are felicitous insensitive assessments of judgments of personal taste, see Lasersohn (2005), Stephenson (2007) and MacFarlane (ms) ch. 1.

⁴These reactions might seem to suggest that, unlike ‘false’ and ‘mistaken’, ‘no’ and ‘yes’ in (3) and (4) are not explicitly *semantic* assessments. Perhaps, then, felicitous semantic assessments are still sensitive? This suggestion, however, fails to explain the infelicity of (5) (which contains ‘you are right’) or with the fact that the following might be perfectly fine as a reply to (2): ‘That’s true, but they didn’t look very appetizing.’ Here, we have an explicitly semantic assessment, and one that is as naturally taken to be based on the assessor’s as on Eduardo’s taste.

⁵Like TASTY-C, MIGHT-C is only a partial analysis, and one that runs roughshod over different versions of contextualism. See note 2. Furthermore, ‘body of information’ is too restrictive, as might-claims can relate to sets of hypothetically entertained propositions. But it covers the cases discussed here. Schaffer (2011) provides what he takes to be evidence that epistemic ‘might’ has a hidden variable, analogous to what he provides for ‘tasty’. Dowell (2011) looks at some of the variation in might-claims that can be accommodated given a suitably flexible understanding of what makes a body of information relevant.

⁶This example is an adaption of the central case in von Fintel & Gillies (2011), which they use for essentially the same purpose. Similar examples can also be provided for epistemic adverbs like ‘perhaps’ and ‘maybe’.

⁷See Dowell (2011), §3.

⁸Like *Lost keys*, this example comes almost verbatim from von Fintel & Gillies (2011), §4. Dowell (2011, §3) discusses what corresponds to Alice’s remark and thinks that she can explain why it seems appropriate, but the immediate trouble for the hypothesis that people understand (10) as a communal claim comes from the intuitive inappropriateness of the question in (18): it should not be seen as inappropriate under a communal interpretation of (10).

⁹Obviously, the question would not *assert* that the keys being in the car is compatible with what Alice knows, but it would pragmatically imply it.

¹⁰Kent Bach (2011, §5) agrees that we sometimes assess might-claims from perspectives other than those relative to which the claims were made. Instead, he rejects the intuition that such assessments are felicitous, arguing that they are based on a mistake about what proposition is expressed by the original utterance. As we have argued here, however, it seems that people are intuitively clear that Alice’s concern in making the judgment is with a solipsistic proposition, that is, with where the keys might be given information available to her. One way to avoid problems with possible communal readings of assessed might-judgments is to make sure that the assessor is not part of the conversation in which the judgment was made. We have avoided leaning on such ‘eavesdropping’ cases, partly because they tend to elicit less solid intuitions than cases like *Lost Keys* and partly for reasons of space. But we think that there are plausible cases of the relevant sort. Consider, for example: ‘They say Smith left town, but I’ve asked around. According to Joe, the Chang brothers too are looking for Smith, and they seem to think that he might be hiding downtown as they have sent some people down there looking for him. I think they’re right that he might be downtown, as he has previously been reluctant to leave home turf, but he might also have left.’ The assessment here (‘I think they’re right’) sounds natural though it seems unlikely that the speaker and the Chang brothers are

relating to the same informational base.

¹¹Obviously, speakers and hearers are often at cross-purposes in a variety of ways, but the coincidence of interests that we have in mind here is merely a coincidence in the conditions that the speaker hopes to have gotten right in making the judgment expressed and the condition the hearer is trying to assess the satisfaction of in cases of apparently open, sincere, and unconfused communication.

¹²To say that not assessing whether the condition obtains requires effort is not of course to say that effort is required not to reach a definite judgment, for assessment are often inconclusive. However, if the information needed for a definite positive or negative assessment is immediately available, we should expect a judgment in the absence of an effort to prevent this.

¹³We have characterized contextualism and assessor-relativism solely in terms of truth-conditions (of utterances, beliefs, judgments, etc) while most of the current debate over contextualism and relativism employs the Kaplanesque distinction between propositional content and circumstances of evaluation. As indicated in footnotes 2 and 5, we hope to be able to ignore a number of semi-technical side issues by using the less fine grained notion of truth-conditions of utterances.

¹⁴We are not saying that S-ASSESSMENT has been an explicit premise in most arguments against contextualism and for assessor-relativistic alternatives, but we do suggest that something like it is implicitly taken for granted in many arguments. Suitably flexible forms of assessor-relativism for ‘tasty’ and ‘might’ will allow that we sometimes assess utterances relative to standards of taste other than our own, or to bodies of information other than those available to us at the time of assessment. However, to account for insensitive assessments, the conventionally indicated default must be to go by standards of taste of assessors and information available to assessors, respectively.

¹⁵There are also numerous ways in which simple forms of assessor-relativism gets the evidence wrong: for some, see von Fintel & Gillies (2008). For an approach that avoids some such problems, see Stephenson (2007).

¹⁶In this case and in most others, felicitous insensitive assessments target propositions that the sentence would have expressed relative to a different context than the actual context of utterance. However, as we shall see in the next section, we take C-ASSESSMENT to have a wider scope than that.

¹⁷We thank an anonymous referee for raising this worry.

¹⁸The approach was briefly sketched in Almér & Björnsson (2009) and developed in detail for practical ‘ought’-judgments in Björnsson & Finlay (2010).

¹⁹von Fintel and Gillies (2008, 81–84) appeal to cases like these to cast doubts on certain attributions of (what we call) insensitive assessments, thereby undermining the sort of assessor-relativism advocated by MacFarlane (2011; ms).

²⁰We borrow Vinnie from Cappelen & Hawthorne (2009), 115–116, e.g..

²¹‘Looks’ is included to remove speaker authority. Notice that the parent’s reply, although sensitive to Dana’s standard of taste, is insensitive to ‘looks’ much as felicitous assessments of ‘I wonder if P’ tend to be insensitive to the speaker’s expressed epistemic attitude towards P.

²²Further cases prompting sensitive assessments are easily generated on the pattern of the cases discussed in section 12, cases prompting sensitive assessments through the use of questions, explanations of behaviour and factives. Moreover, examples can easily be generated where insensitive assessments seem inappropriate: We, to Vinnie the Vulture:

'Vinnie, this should be really tasty, the rot has really set in.' John: 'No, it's not tasty, it's disgusting.' We: 'John, we are talking about what is tasty to Vinnie.'

²³We thank Derek Ball for focussing our attention on the issue of implicatures.

²⁴Different people might attach accusatory connotations of different strengths to different expressions. We expect 'that's not true' to be slightly less accusatory and thus more compatible with felicitous insensitive assessments than 'that's false.' Nearly all proposed examples of insensitive assessments in the literature use 'no' for expressions of negative assessments or rejections, with some occasional uses of 'Nuh-uh' (Stephenson 2007) and the occasional 'not true'. One exception is MacFarlane (2011).

²⁵The claim here is not that this is the essence of real disagreement. What we think is merely that it captures the bases for some intuitions about disagreement that have figured in the debate. For certain purposes, it might make sense to say that disagreement *proper* involves disagreement about the truth of a proposition with monadic truth-conditions.

²⁶The more ambitious answer, and one that has famously tempted a number of people of different theoretical stripes, adopts these abstractions—'propositions' that are true or false only relative to, say, assessors' standards of taste—as basic building blocks in semantic theory (e.g. Kölbel 2004, MacFarlane 2005, 2007; Egan 2007; Lasersohn 2005, Stephenson 2007 and Brogaard 2008). Obviously, Kaplanesque semantics already takes propositions to be true or false relative to times and worlds; these proposals want to add further parameters for judges, standards of taste or similar. For criticism of various forms of relativistic semantics, see e.g. Cappelen & Hawthorne (2009). We would prefer being liberal about the issue, allowing different theoretical building blocks for different parts of semantic theory or different explanatory needs, but there is no need for us to take a stand here.

²⁷Bach (2011), §5 also appeals to the pragmatic priority of might-propositions relating to more expansive bodies of information in explaining insensitive assessments.

²⁸Stephenson (2007, 511–512) discusses a similar case and denies that a might-claim like that made by the host in (52) is best understood as relating to addressee's information, because a paraphrase of *might P* as 'you don't know if P' renders the resulting utterance unnatural. However, this paraphrase is quite loose, and the stricter 'you cannot rule out that P' results in a perfectly appropriate utterance.

²⁹Both Bach (2011, §6) and von Fintel and Gillies (2008, 93–94) employ 'realize' to illustrate sensitive assessments of might judgments.

³⁰There are some fairly subtle differences. One is that might-judgments seem to leave more room for errors in reasoning than do most taste-judgments, thus allowing more easily for assessments with accusatory implications: 'I was wrong', 'you are mistaken', and so forth. Another is that might-judgments embed propositions that become possible targets of assessments, just as propositions embedded in attributions of propositional attitudes often are. When Alice says 'The keys might be in the car' and Beth replies 'No, I had them when I came in', Beth's 'no' might be understood as rejecting the proposition that the keys are in the car as well as the proposition that they might be there (von Fintel & Gillies 2008, 82–84). (Since both rejections would contribute to the task at hand and since both would rest on the same considerations, 'No' is most likely understood to express both.)

³¹The phenomenon was identified by Allan Gibbard 1981.

³²See e.g. Stalnaker (1981); Weatherson (2001); Nolan (2003); and Björnsson (2011:

§5.6). For brevity, we ignore differences in views about how the relevant bodies of information are selected, yielding corresponding differences in how 'objective' conditionals are.

³³Weatherson focuses on agreement, but one might also want to say that Curly is in a position to disagree with Basil, and respond to his utterance with 'No, if it isn't in A, it won't be in C' or 'That's wrong, it can't be in C.' However, since intuitions about the latter might be clouded by accusatory connotations, and it is somewhat unclear whether 'No' in the former really targets the full utterance rather than the consequent, this makes for a less clean case.

³⁴In the case where inferences from $\sim A$ are concerned, A or assumptions relying on A will not be part of that body of information.

³⁵Björnsson and Finlay (2011, 25–36) argue that the explanation for insensitive assessments of moral ought-judgments relating to bodies of information other than those of the assessor extends to ought-judgments relating to different moral standards than those endorsed by the assessor. They develop their pragmatic explanation against the background assumption that people with sufficiently different moral views have different propositions in mind when they make moral judgments. This is obviously denied by moral objectivists, but we think that arguments for moral objectivism are weak. See e.g. Tersman (2006), Björnsson (ms). For the best developed contextualist analysis of normative and evaluative terms that we are familiar with, see Finlay (ms).

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