

Relativism and Assertion

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Abstract: Relativism entails that sentences like ‘Liquorice is tasty’ are used to assert relativistic propositions, that is, propositions whose truth-value is relative to a taste standard. I will defend this view against two objections. According to the first objection, relativism is incompatible with a Stalnakerian account of assertion. I will show that this objection fails because Stalnakerian assertions are proposals rather than attempts to update the common ground. According to the second objection, relativism problematically predicts that we can correctly assess beliefs as false but faultless. I will show that it doesn’t. Such assessments come out as incorrect because correct relativistic assertion requires the absence of a presupposition of non-commonality.

Keywords: relativism; predicates of personal taste; assertion; Stalnaker

1. Introduction

Suppose that A likes liquorice, and B hates it. A and B are offered a piece of liquorice. A sincerely utters ‘Liquorice is tasty’, and B sincerely utters ‘Liquorice is not tasty’. Intuitively, it may be the case that (i) A’s and B’s assertions are fully correct (or ‘faultless’) and, at the same time, (ii) A and B are contradicting each other. *Relativism* is supposed to make sense of these intuitions in the following way.

On the one hand, relativism entails that sentences like ‘Liquorice is (not) tasty’ are standardly used to assert that liquorice is (not) tasty. In particular, according to relativism, A asserts that liquorice is tasty, while B asserts that liquorice is not tasty. This supposedly explains (ii) in (very) roughly the following way: Liquorice cannot be tasty and not tasty. So if A and B respectively assert these propositions, they are asserting contradictory propositions. This means that they are contradicting each other.

On the other hand, and more importantly for my purposes, relativism entails the following two claims: First, the truth-value of the above tastiness propositions is relative to a taste standard. In particular, the proposition that liquorice is tasty is true relative to A’s taste standard even though it is false relative to B’s (because A likes liquorice and B hates it).¹ Second, the following relation holds between (relative) truth and correctness (where p ranges over propositions with relevantly relative truth-values):

(T) An assertion that p by a speaker S is correct only if p is true relative to S ’s taste standard.

These principles allow the relativist to explain (i) roughly as follows: Given A’s and B’s predilections, A’s and B’s assertion satisfy (T). There may be further (for instance, epistemic, pragmatic or social) conditions for correctness. These conditions, however, seem unproblematic. For instance, A and B are justified in making their respective claims if they have tried liquorice. Similarly, there is no reason to suspect that their claims need to

¹ I am assuming that a subject’s taste standard is the taste standard the subject has herself. To be precise, though, this need not be the case. In so-called ‘exocentric’ contexts, for instance, S ’s taste standard may be the taste standard of another subject in S ’s environment. See, e.g., Lasersohn [2005]. For the purposes of this paper, I think we can ignore these intricacies. I am further assuming, maybe somewhat simplistically, that the taste standard a given subject has is determined by what food the subject likes (such that, roughly, some food x is tasty relative to the taste standard S has iff S likes x). Refinements of this assumption shouldn’t affect my arguments either.

be, say, irrelevant or impolite. So, given relativism, A's and B's assertions can be fully correct even if they are contradicting each other.

My paper seeks to defend relativism so understood against two related worries and thereby to clarify the position further. The first worry has it that relativism cannot make sense of the correctness of A's and B's assertions once we accept a Stalnakerian account of assertion. I will argue that this worry is based on a misconception of the Stalnakerian account. Properly understood, this account entails only that correct relativistic assertion requires the absence of a presupposition of non-commonality. This requirement, however, is independently plausible. The second worry has it that relativism counter-intuitively severs the connection between (monadic) truth and correctness. I will argue that relativists can explain away the intuitions in question once they accept the previously derived no-presupposition-of-non-commonality requirement.

There are, of course, further potential worries with relativism, for instance, regarding the relativist account of the contradiction intuition (ii). I will set them aside for now even though I think that what I have to say goes some way towards addressing these concerns (see Dinges [forthcoming] for further discussion).

Note that the arguments in this paper apply to all versions of relativism, in particular, to both non-indexical relativism and assessment relativism. In essence, this is so because proponents of both these versions of relativism tend to subscribe to a reflexive truth norm of assertion along the lines of (T)² and because only this norm will figure in the arguments to come. Given that the distinction between the two versions of relativism is irrelevant here, further details need not be supplied. Note also that, in presenting relativism, I have

² See, e.g., Kölbel [2003: 70]; Egan et al. [2005: 153]; Stephenson [2007: 509]; MacFarlane [2014: 116]. Lasersohn [2005: 670] should be happy with (T) as long as we acknowledge the flexibility in footnote 1. This may not be entirely clear though. Richard [2008] might be an exception.

been glossing over many technical details required to turn relativism into a proper semantics for taste predicates. This simplification should help us to keep our eye on the ball. Still, I invite the reader to fill in the view in their favoured way. The substance of my paper should be unaffected.

2. Stalnakerian assertion

Here is the first worry for relativism I would like to address. As indicated, this worry arises once we assume a Stalnakerian account of assertion, according to which ‘the essential effect of an assertion is to change the presuppositions of the participants in the conversation by adding the content of what is asserted to what is presupposed.’ [Stalnaker 1978: 323] Given this account, the worry goes, relativism cannot deliver on the idea that A’s and B’s assertions are correct, at least when A and B are talking to each other. As Egan [2014: 93] puts it: When A and B are talking to each other,

both parties are asserting things that ought not be added to the conversational presuppositions. They’re trying to get the conversation’s common ground into a state where it takes a stand on something about which it ought to fall silent, since there’s no presupposition to adopt that would be true of all of the parties to the conversation.

Suppose, in particular, that A utters ‘Liquorice is tasty’ in the presence of B. According to relativism, A will thereby assert that liquorice is tasty. Given that B hates liquorice, B cannot correctly believe that proposition if we assume a correctness norm for belief analogous to (T) (again, p ranges over propositions with relevantly relative truth-values):

(T-B) A belief that p by a believer B is correct only if p is true relative to B’s taste standard.

Hence, this proposition shouldn't be added to the common ground.³ Egan [2014: 93] concludes that there is a 'certain kind of *faultiness* we get—both parties assertions are defective as conversational moves'. This looks like a problematic result, for it simply doesn't seem to be the case that A would be performing a defective conversational move in saying 'Liquorice is tasty' whenever she is talking to B (analogously for B talking to A).⁴

Here is my response to this worry. The mistaken premise is that Stalnakerian assertion requires that the speaker 'tries' to get the common ground into a state where it includes the asserted proposition. This is not true in general (cp. Stephenson [2007: 511]). Stalnaker elucidates this point with a case where you say to O'Leary that she is a fool knowing 'in advance that O'Leary would not accept the assertion.' Stalnaker [1978: 324] explicitly concludes that his 'suggestion about the essential effect of assertion does not imply that speakers *intend* to succeed in getting the addressee to accept the content of the assertion.' Correspondingly, he doesn't describe an assertion as an 'attempt' to change the common ground (as Egan sometimes does), but 'as a *proposal* to change the context by adding the content to the information presupposed.' [1999a: 10, my emphasis]

This is important because there need not be anything defective at all with making a proposal to do something even if it turns out in the end that the proposed action shouldn't be performed. Suppose, for instance, that we are deliberating what to do tonight in a larger

³ To be precise, a proposition may be in the common ground without being believed. Officially, the state required is *acceptance*. See, e.g., Stalnaker [2002: 716f]. One might want to reject the above argument because a principle like (T-B) doesn't hold for acceptance. I don't want to attack the argument along these lines though because I think that acceptance is guided by a principle like (T-B) *except in special circumstances*. Stalnaker [1999b: 51], for instance, suggests that in 'normal, straightforward serious conversational contexts', what the speakers accept just is what they believe. So if we assume that the conversations I am concerned with in this paper are normal in the relevant sense (as I will subsequently do), the present rejoinder doesn't get off the ground. I will leave further discussion for another occasion.

⁴ Note that relativism is not by definition incompatible with the above outcome. At least as I have stated the view, relativists only hold that assertions of 'Liquorice is tasty' and 'Liquorice is not tasty' *can* be correct at the same time. Relativists certainly don't say that such assertions are *always* correct. In particular, cases where the speakers in question engage with one another might be seen as an exception. In this vein, Egan [2014: 93f] bites the bullet and grants this result. This is one way for the relativist to respond to the worry above. In what follows, I will spell out a (to my mind) more satisfactory response.

group of people. You propose that we go to the movies. Making this proposal seems perfectly fine even if, in the end, it turns out that some of the people involved hate going to the movies and hence that we shouldn't go. After all, those who hate the movies can simply reject the proposal. Assertions of relativistic propositions should be understood along these lines. A's relativistic assertion that liquorice is tasty is a proposal to add the proposition that liquorice is tasty to the common ground. If A is talking to liquorice-hating B, this proposal shouldn't be implemented. But, just like in the movies case, this doesn't mean that the proposal is defective in any way. B can simply reject it, and no harm will be done.⁵

Of course, it must be granted that A's assertion towards B will be unsuccessful in the same sense in which a proposal is unsuccessful if it isn't adopted. After all, the proposition that liquorice is tasty won't be common ground after A's assertion (because B won't accept it). One may now want to say that this suffices already to make the assertion defective in some sense or other. Admittedly, the notion of defectiveness may be flexible enough to cover such cases. In any case, I don't want to dispute over words here. For one thing, though, Egan seems to have a different kind of defectiveness in mind. The problem he sees has to do with the fact that the asserted proposition *shouldn't* end up in the common ground, not with the fact that it *won't* end up there. For another thing, the prediction

⁵ I think that relativists from various domains (such as aesthetics and ethics) can adopt this proposal to defend their views against worries of the above kind. The proposal, however, cannot be used to make sense of positions according to which first-person pronouns give rise to *de se* assertions (see, e.g., Lewis [1979]). For when I assert 'My pants are on fire', I certainly don't even propose that (among other things) you accept that *your* pants are on fire. This means either that the Stalnakerian account of assertion must be modified to make room for such positions or, to my mind more plausibly, that sentences involving first-person pronouns only express *de se* contents, but aren't used to assert them. See, e.g., Egan [2014: 91] for the latter conclusion (and Kölbel [2013, 2014] for a closely related suggestion). Another option would be to reject even the idea that such contents are expressed. See, e.g., Cappelen and Hawthorne [2009: 50ff]. For the purposes of this paper, I need not take a stand on these issues. Stalnaker's account of assertion may not be compatible with everything; I only want to show that it is compatible with relativism as presently understood. (Analogous considerations hold for temporal propositions as discussed, e.g., in Richard [1981].)

that A's assertion is defective in the sense of being unsuccessful doesn't seem problematic at all. In fact, it seems very natural to describe the exchange between A and B as one where B won't come to accept what A asserted. Thus, it is independently natural to say that A's assertion will be unsuccessful, and, if anything, it is an asset of relativism that it predicts this. (From now on, I will use the notion of defectiveness (and related notions such as the notions of correctness or propriety) as involving no entailments about the success of an assertion.)

Note that A's assertion towards B remains fine on the Stalnakerian conception if we assume not only that B doesn't share A's taste standard, but also that A doesn't presuppose that B shares her taste standard; that is, that A doesn't presuppose that it would be fine to add the proposition that liquorice is tasty to the common ground. For, at least in general, one can properly make a proposal even if one doesn't presuppose that everybody can happily accept it. Suppose, for instance, that my friend and I want to go out for dinner. We are living in a larger city, so there are plenty of options. Each of us proposes places we could go to. For the first couple of places, it turns out that whenever you like the place in question, I don't, and *vice versa*. At least at some point, it seems, we should stop presupposing (if we ever did) that the other will like the restaurant we are going to propose next. Even so, the proposals remain perfectly fine. In fact, it seems that one perfectly sensible reason to make a proposal is that one wants to find out whether everybody can agree on the proposed action.

As before, this outcome seems to be in line with intuitively plausible verdicts about proper taste judgments. Suppose you have been cooking dinner for us, and at the table I am the first to assert 'This is delicious!' If everybody agrees, I will come to accept that we share a taste standard, but my assertion seems fine even if I didn't presuppose that

beforehand already. If someone rejects my assertion, I might not even come to accept that taste standards are shared. Still, my assertion wouldn't seem defective at all (even though, of course, it would now be unsuccessful in the above sense).⁶

The situation will change if we assume that A presupposes that B doesn't share her taste standard (rather than just failing to presuppose that B shares it); that is, that A presupposes that it would be problematic to add the proposition that liquorice is tasty to the common ground. At least, the situation will change if A knows that taste standards aren't shared. If you know already that I will hate going to the movies with you, then there is certainly something wrong with proposing that we go to the movies together. Correspondingly, it should be problematic for A in the presence of B to assert that liquorice is tasty when A knows that B hates liquorice (A might know this because B told her before).

This shows that the relativist cannot maintain that A's and B's assertions are fully correct in all contexts. The specific restriction imposed, however, is unproblematic because it is borne out by the data. Suppose I propose that we go to the movies in spite of my knowledge of your aversion towards the movies. This would certainly be strange in some sense. In any case, the proper response seems to be, 'You know I hate the movies!' The situation in the case of predicates of personal taste is perfectly analogous. The felicity of the following example from López de Sa [2015: 162] nicely illustrates this point: "Come here and watch this! *King of the Hill* is so funny!'" – "Funny *for you*, darling. You should remember that it doesn't amuse me at all.'" Similarly, Pearson [2013: 137]

⁶ Egan [2014: 93] holds that taste claims are problematic if there is no presupposition of shared taste standards. See also López de Sa [2008, 2015] and Pearson [2013: 137]. My views conflict with this approach. In particular, if tastiness assertions did require a presupposition of commonality, they should be problematic in the just described case, where someone rejects my assertion of 'This is delicious' at the dinner table. For in this case, there is no such presupposition. Note though that I will argue for a closely related principle below, namely, that proper taste claims require the absence of a presupposition of non-commonality. This principle, I think, captures the driving intuitions behind the presupposition of commonality approach and yet avoids the indicated problematic consequences.

points out that it seems generally problematic to assert ‘Soapy dishwater is tasty’ even if the speaker sincerely loves the taste of soapy dishwater. Again, the present account immediately predicts why this is so: someone who loves soapy dishwater will know that no one shares her taste standard.

What about dialogues of the form, A: ‘X is tasty’ – B: ‘No, X is not tasty’? They can seem fine, but once A says ‘X is tasty’ B should come to know that she doesn’t share A’s taste standard (assuming that taste standards aren’t shared). So shouldn’t the second utterance always be problematic on the present account? No.

First, B need not come to know this. For instance, if she thinks X is very disgusting and if she has found this judgment uncontroversial so far, she might want to make sure that A isn’t mistaken about her taste standard or the identity of X before she concludes that taste standards genuinely differ. In such cases, the response ‘No, X is not tasty’ may be perfectly fine even on the present account (cp. Egan [2014: 93]).

Second, I have been assuming so far that A and B don’t engage in make-believe to the effect that they don’t know their taste standards differ (in spite of the fact that they do). Pearson [2013: 137] plausibly suggests that we sometimes do engage in such make-believe. When we do, dialogues of the above form may be fine according to relativism even if B comes to know that A doesn’t share her taste standard. This is particularly relevant for extended disputes, where ‘we persist in arguing about whether [something] is tasty’ [ibid.: 137]. Such extended disputes, I think, are quite naturally described as involving some sort of insincerity, tongue-in-cheek-ness or overtly unwarranted stubbornness at least in many cases (cp. Zakkou [2015]).

One might worry that these considerations fail to cover all cases. Couldn’t it be fine for B to say ‘X is not tasty’ even if she comes to know that taste standards aren’t shared

and doesn't engage in make-believe? A reviewer particularly suggests that such a response would be fine if B believes 'that her palate is much more refined than A's or that she is more experienced in taste matters, etc.'

I will present three possible responses to cases of this type. I will leave open which account to prefer in the end. They all seem viable options to me. First, I agree that people with refined tastes say 'This is tasty' even in the presence of others with less refined tastes who knowingly don't share their taste standard. I would also say, though, that such assertions can easily have an elitist flavour. So one possible account would be that, when making such an assertion, one excludes the 'primitive tasters' from the conversation, or at least treats them as no longer on an equal footing with the 'refined tasters'. Once they are so excluded, the no-knowledge-of-non-commonality requirement doesn't apply to them, and there is no tension anymore with the account proposed.

Second, relativists could say that proper relativistic assertion requires not truth relative to one's *actual* taste standard but truth relative one's *refined* taste standard, that is, the standard that one *would* acquire if appropriately trained. On this view, proper relativistic assertion requires that speakers don't know that refined (rather than actual) taste standards aren't shared. And this condition is plausibly met in the case described. For even if B knows that her taste standard differs from A's taste standard (in being more refined), she plausibly doesn't know that her taste standard differs from A's *refined* taste standard. (On pain of collapsing into objectivism, the relativist will have to make sure, of course, that even refined taste standards can differ between subjects.)

Third, the relativist could treat the envisaged cases as exocentrically tied to the taste standard of an expert community (see footnote 1 for the idea of an exocentric context). This would be particularly promising for disputes about types of food (such as wine),

where there clearly is an expert community. These would also seem to be the kinds of cases that most naturally give rise to situations like the one described by the reviewer above.⁷

Even if these accounts are granted, cases remain where relativism doesn't allow B to respond to A by asserting 'X is not tasty'. To make this palatable, note that the offered account puts no restriction whatsoever on a broad range of closely related (and to my ear more natural) responses. For instance, it remains entirely unproblematic for B to respond by saying 'I disagree', 'I don't like it so much', 'Not for me', 'Maybe for you', etc. By using these sentences, B won't assert a relativistic proposition. Correspondingly, there is no tension with the relativistic assertion framework outlined. It may even be appropriate for B to respond by using 'denial devices' such as 'No' or 'Nuh-uh'. For at least within the Stalnakerian framework, it is not clear whether B would thereby be making an assertion at all. In saying 'Liquorice is tasty', A proposes to update the common ground by adding the proposition that X is tasty (t). By saying 'No' or 'Nuh-uh', B rejects this proposal. But this needn't mean that she proposes to add not-t (or any other proposition) to the common ground. In the same way, when I propose 'Let's add some sugar' and you respond 'No', you refuse to add sugar but you do not thereby suggest to add something else.⁸ I admit, though, that these last points (about 'No' and 'Nu-uh') may require further elaboration.

To sum up, whereas Egan is led to conclude that proper relativistic assertion requires commonality—or at least a presupposition of commonality—regarding taste standards, I

⁷ Thanks to Fiona Doherty for bringing this last option to my attention.

⁸ Such non-asserting uses of 'No' seem common-place even as responses to non-relativistic assertions. 'No. You don't know that', for instance, seems to be a perfectly legitimate way to reject an assertion without asserting its contrary. A google search reveals the following real life example (from the TV series *Arrow*, season 4, episode 21): 'This is me singing my badge away' – 'No. You don't know that. All you can know for sure is that you're doing the right thing'.

think the Stalnakerian framework imposes a weaker requirement, namely, that there be no presupposition of non-commonality. This weaker requirement, in turn, seems perfectly in line with the data.

3. Truth and correctness

The requirement that there be no presupposition of non-commonality also helps to answer the following, second worry about relativism: Given (T-B), relativists presumably want to say that people are often correct when they hold beliefs about what is tasty that are true relative to their own taste standard. Now if somebody correctly holds such a belief, it will be a non-relative truth that her belief is correct, so everybody should be able to acknowledge it. As it turns out, though, relativism itself undermines this very commitment. For relativism entails that one cannot acknowledge that somebody else's taste belief is correct whenever one fails to share their taste standard. Richard [2008: 132] puts the reasoning as follows (cp. Cappelen and Hawthorne [2009: 131]; Boghossian [2011: 61f]; Wright [2012: 439–41]; Huvenes [2014: sec. 6]; Ferrari [forthcoming]):

Suppose I think that Beaufort is a better cheese than Tome, and you think the reverse. Suppose (for *reductio*) that each of our thoughts is valid—mine is true from my perspective, yours is from yours. Then not only can I (validly) say that Beaufort is better than Tome, I can (validly) say that it's true that Beaufort is better than Tome. And of course if you think Tome is better than Beaufort and not vice versa I can also (validly) say that you think that it's not the case that Beaufort is better than Tome. So I can (validly) say that it's true that Beaufort is better than Tome though you think Beaufort isn't better than Tome. From which it surely follows that you're mistaken—after all, if you have a false belief, you are mistaken about something.

(Note that I am assuming that a belief is correct just in case the believer didn't make a mistake in forming the belief. Those who prefer to speak in terms of mistakes rather than correctness (as Richard does) should substitute the notions throughout the paper. Nothing should depend on this.)

How should we respond to this worry? I think the conclusion of the argument is genuinely worrisome for the relativist, the reasoning to this conclusion, however, is unsound. In particular, we should reject the premise that ‘if you have a false belief, you are mistaken about something.’ We can rephrase this premise in a slightly more rigorous form as follows:

(P) If what X believes is false, then X’s belief is mistaken.

To begin with, it is important to note that just assuming this premise would beg the question against relativism. For relativism (at least on my understanding) straightforwardly entails that (P) is false (cp. MacFarlane [2012: 453]). In particular, there will be taste standards relative to which the antecedent of the conditional in (P) is true while the consequent is false. Take A and B. It is true relative to A’s taste standard that liquorice is tasty. Hence, it is true relative to A’s standard that it is true that liquorice is tasty and, correspondingly, that it is false that liquorice is not tasty.⁹ Assuming that B believes that liquorice is not tasty, it follows that it is true relative to A’s taste standard that what B believes is false (this the antecedent of (P) when ‘B’ is substituted for ‘X’). Even so, given (T-B), B’s belief is correct because what B believes is true relative to B’s taste standard (assuming that B meets the requirements for proper belief that go beyond (T-B)). This, in turn, is true relative to any taste standard, including A’s. Hence, relative to A’s taste standard, B’s belief is correct, that is, not mistaken (this is the denial of the consequent of (P) when ‘B’ is substituted for ‘X’).

Given that relativism entails that (P) is false, we clearly cannot just take this premise for granted in an argument against relativism. We need independent reasons that force the

⁹ See, e.g., Kölbel [2008: 248ff] and MacFarlane [2014: 93] for the equivalence principles required to underwrite the above derivations.

relativist to accept it in spite of her commitment to the contrary. What could these reasons be? Richard doesn't provide any, but the basic idea seems to be an appeal to intuition. Huvenes [2014: 150], for instance, tries to convince us of (P) by noting 'how strange it would be to say something like [...] "Mary's belief that haggis is tasty is false, but she isn't making a mistake."' Similarly, Wright [2012: 441] claims that a relativist who denies (P) 'wind[s] up affirming that you believe something truly although what you believe isn't true. That sounds like pretty good nonsense, and it is certainly no intended aspect of the folk thought.'

Let's grant that these intuitions are sound. As applied to my terminology, let's grant that it sounds intuitively odd to assert,

(*) What X believes is false, but X's belief is correct all the same.

What does this show? Clearly, even if we grant the intuition about (*), (P) doesn't follow immediately. Rather, the argument for (P) seems to be an argument to the best explanation along the following lines: (*) sounds generally problematic. The best explanation for this is that its conjuncts are incompatible. Thus, if you believe something false, your belief cannot be correct (that is, (P)).

Should we accept this argument for (P)? I don't think so. Quite generally, we should accept an argument to the best explanation only if alternative explanations have been ruled out. No proponent of the above argument bothers to do so. This wouldn't be so worrisome if no such accounts came to mind. However, relativism itself, at least as presently outlined, offers such an account: Assume that Y asserts (*) and that, for the sake of concreteness, she is referring to X's belief that liquorice is tasty (the subsequent argument would go through just as well for any belief with a relativistic content on the part of X).

If relativism is correct, one can infer from the first conjunct of (*) ('What X believes is false') that liquorice is not tasty relative to Y's taste standard. At least, the assertion of this conjunct is correct for Y only if this is so. From the second conjunct of (*) ('X's belief is correct'), one can moreover infer that liquorice is tasty relative to X's taste standard. Again, the correctness of the assertion of this conjunct requires this. These two claims, in turn, entail that X's and Y's taste standards relevantly differ. As a result, there should be a presupposition of non-commonality regarding X and Y once Y has asserted (*). Given the discussion of the previous worry, though, this means that Y's assertion of (the first conjunct of) (*) will be incorrect at least as long as X is among Y's interlocutors. For we have seen that correct relativistic assertion requires that there be no presupposition of non-commonality regarding one's interlocutors. So, we have a straightforward explanation of why asserting (*) will be incorrect at least whenever X is among the speaker's interlocutors.

What if X is not among the interlocutors? Doesn't (*) still seem weird? And doesn't the story above fail to apply in these cases? This is unclear. When we make a proposal to do something, we certainly take into account the views of our immediate co-actors. But we will also consider those who might easily join us; and we may have people in mind that we want to be able to join us even if we don't know whether they can easily make it. For instance, I might propose an action movie rather than a comedy because my partner doesn't like comedies even if she hasn't told me yet whether she has other plans already. Analogously, the no-presupposition-of-non-commonality requirement plausibly extends to speakers who aren't part of the conversation but could easily become part of it (or some later continuation of it), or whom we may want to have a say.¹⁰ In this vein, dialogues of

¹⁰ See López de Sa [2008: 307] for a closely related idea in a similar context. He also suggests that his requirement of a presupposition of commonality extends to speakers 'where there are possible (close, easily

the following type seem perfectly natural: ‘That was a great movie!’ – ‘I liked it too, but let’s see what Hannah has to say about it’. The second speaker refuses to update the common ground before Hannah has had a chance to weigh in (assume Hannah is returning the 3D glasses when the dialogue takes place). It seems quite plausible that, at least in many cases, X will be in one of the indicated groups when (*) is uttered. After all, by uttering (*), we are discussing X’s thoughts, so X may well be among our regular interlocutors, and we should have an interest in X’s view on the matter.

This may not cover all cases, but I think at this point it is important not to overstate the robustness of our intuitions regarding (*). Something doesn’t feel right about this sentence, but it isn’t altogether problematic. Assume that X and Y have relevantly different taste standards and that Y is aware of this. Then it seems only natural that Y should have a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards X’s beliefs about what is tasty. If X, for instance, believes that liquorice is tasty, then Y should have a tendency to reject this belief. On the other hand, she will plausibly see that, given X’s taste standard, X is entitled to her belief. To my mind, at least, it wouldn’t seem clearly weird for Y to express this ambivalent attitude by using (*) (or some closely related sentence), at least as long as X is not among her interlocutors.

One might worry that, independently of the presence of X, the proposed account has no bearing on intuitions to the effect that it would be problematic to judge in thought (rather than to assert) that (*), for judgments in thought aren’t bound by the no-presupposition-of-non-commonality requirement. To respond, we might somewhat speculatively suggest that when one judges in thought that (*), and thus forms a judgment about X’s opinions, one may well imagine X as an interlocutor in a silent dialogue. This might make

actualizable) conversations, which would involve the people in question’ or where such conversations are ‘[i]magined, or easily imaginable’.

the judgment appear problematic because it would be problematic if X could hear it. More importantly, though, the relevant intuitions don't seem robust to me at least when the subjects' taste standards knowingly differ (see Egan et al. [2005: 153] and Kölbel [2015: 39f] for similar verdicts).

In sum, relativism offers an account of why (*) sounds odd that doesn't wed her to the worrisome premise (P). Given this account, it is at least no longer clear whether (P) is the best explanation for why (*) sounds odd. Hence, the objection under discussion doesn't get off the ground.

4. Conclusion

Relativists can respond to the worries discussed. First, the Stalnakerian framework is compatible with relativism. It entails that proper relativistic assertion requires the absence of a presupposition of non-commonality, but this requirement is independently plausible. Second, relativism severs the connection between (monadic) truth and correctness, but the rebelling intuitions can be explained away once we accept the no-presupposition-of-non-commonality requirement.¹¹

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