

FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT AND THE
EQUAL VALIDITY PARADOX

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Abstract

The putative phenomenon of faultless disagreement gives rise to the

Equal validity Paradox. The Equal Validity Paradox is an argument that generates a contradiction by assuming that the set of utterances that give rise to the appearance of faultless disagreement can be non-empty, and by constraining the properties of these utterances by means of five principles specifically related to faultless disagreement and equal validity together with two general principles about the truth properties of utterances and propositions. The paradox allows for eight solutions. Some of these solutions are well known (realism, contextualism and relativism), whereas others are less explored (if at all) in the literature on faultless disagreement (analetheism, dialetheism, semantic indeterminism and non-cognitivism). We argue that each of these solutions is, ultimately, a revisionist approach to faultless disagreement: instead of accounting for faultless disagreement, the paradox is a symptom of glitches in our conception of faultless disagreement.

§1 Relativism and the Equal Validity Paradox

When it comes to disputes of inclination—i.e. disputes about what is tasty, beautiful and morally right—we seem to witness the existence of cases where contrary opinions are in good standing and subjects aren't at fault—this phenomenon is known in the philosophical literature as “faultless disagreement” (see Kölbel 2003). A well known problem,

perhaps the main difficulty, for any account of the concept of faultless disagreement is that a genuine dispute seems incompatible with the idea of *equal validity*¹—namely with the idea that the opinions involved in the dispute are equally valid. Suppose one maintains P and the other not-P. The Law of Non-Contradiction² (henceforth "LNC") tells us that they can't both be right (or wrong). Hence any account that is meant to take seriously the idea of faultless disagreement cannot be coherently formulated. Let us call this problem the *Equal Validity Paradox*.

¹ We borrow the term "equal validity" from Boghossian (2006).

² It is well known that there are several ways to formulate LNC, in fact several aspects have to be fixed in order to state this principle properly. First, it must be decided the nature of nature of the law: whether syntactic, pragmatic, semantic or ontological; secondly, it must be clarified the type of contradiction: whether explicit or implicit; thirdly it must be decided what the objects of contradiction are: whether sentences (token, types), statements, claims, propositions, or state of affairs; finally it must be said which type of negation is involved: whether classical negation or non-classical. These choices give rise to a potentially large number of formulations of LNC, Patrick Grim (2004) has in fact calculated that there are at least 240 possible formulations of LNC! Given the orthodox assumption that propositions are the objects of our attitudes and since we are primarily interested in the attitudes of disputing subjects, we will use the following semantic formulation:

LNC (semantic reading) propositions P and not-P cannot be both true in the same circumstances

To get clear about the structure of the paradox, let's illustrate it in details by means of the following utterances:

Mary: "Ginger is tasty"

Jane: "Ginger is not tasty"

Call these *the yes-no utterances*, and let's conceive an utterance as an ordered couple $\langle s, c \rangle$ where s is the uttered sentence and c the context of use of the sentence relevant for the utterance. The yes-no-utterances are the class of those utterances expressing disputes with the appearance of faultless disagreement. Intuitions related to the subjective character of taste discourse—i.e. to the fact that the yes-no utterances give rise to the appearance of faultless disagreement—suggest that these utterances must be equally valid. Suppose their equal validity entails that their semantic status is on a par. The hypothesis that they are both false doesn't seem relevant here: the notion of equal validity seems to exclude the falsity of these utterances since any faultless assertion requires the truth of the asserted content. Hence if their semantic status is on a par and if they aren't both false, it seems to follow that they are both true. Suppose thus that they are

where the notion of circumstances is intuitively taken to represent those aspects of reality against which the proposition is evaluated (possible worlds are the standard case).

both true. Given the schema connecting utterance truth and propositional truth—if an utterance $\langle s, c \rangle$ says that p then $\langle s, c \rangle$ is true only if p is true in the circumstances of evaluation of the context of utterance c –, and given what the yes-no utterances say, we have that the proposition that ginger is tasty and the proposition that ginger is not tasty are both true in the relevant circumstances of evaluation. Now given that these contents are taken to represent those aspects of reality against which the proposition is evaluated and given that both contexts seem to involve the same representationally relevant aspects—i.e. the same possible world—we can infer that the two utterances are related to the same circumstances of evaluation. Hence the proposition that ginger is tasty and the proposition that ginger is not tasty are both true in the *same* circumstances. However, by LNC these two latter propositions cannot both be true in the same world, hence, by *reductio*, we can conclude that, despite the equal validity intuition, the yes-no utterances cannot both be equally valid. Conclusion: the equal validity intuition cannot find a coherent formulation when it

comes to the yes-no-utterances involved in a dispute of inclination.^{3 4}

Before presenting the argument in a more detailed form, let's make some notational stipulations. The expressions “<s,c>” and “<s',c'>” denote two utterances constituting an arbitrary instance of yes-no utterances. We

³ The Equal Validity Paradox is closely related to Crispin Wright's “simple deduction” (Wright 2001:56). The main differences are: i) Wright's argument is formulated only by reference to propositions; ii) Wright uses the notion of “no cognitive shortcoming” for unpacking the idea of faultlessness, whereas we unpack the notion by means of a semantic reading of equal validity. More generally, the Equal Validity Paradox can be seen as a theoretical translation of the Simple Deduction where the relevant principles involved are made explicit and where the relation between utterances, contents and attitudes is problematised.

⁴ Interestingly, the Equal Validity Paradox shares some analogy with the No-No Paradox. The No-No Paradox was first formulated in Sorensen (2001:175-180), we refer to the following formulation present in Greenough (2011).

“Consider the following sentences:

The neighbouring sentence is not true.

employ two notions of truth: absolute utterance truth and relative propositional truth. To express utterance truth we use the predicate “x is true” that applies to utterances; this predicate is meant to express the property of an utterance of being true *simpliciter*. To express relative propositional truth, we use the relational expression “x is true relative to y”; this relational expression expresses the truth of propositions relative to the circumstances of evaluation. Sometimes we use the expression “circ(<s,c>)” to identify the circumstances relevant for this notion of relative propositional truth. Very simply, the expression “circ(<s,c>)” denotes the circumstances of evaluation relevant for the truth of the

The neighbouring sentence is not true.

Call these *the no-no sentences*. Symmetry considerations dictate that the no-no sentences must both possess the same truth-value. Suppose they are both true. Given Tarski’s truth-schema—if a sentence *S* says that *p* then *S* is true iff *p*—and given what they say, they are both not true. Contradiction! Conclude: they are not both true. Suppose they are both false. Given Tarski’s falsity-schema—if a sentence *S* says that *p* then *S* is false iff not-*p*—and given what they say, they are both true, and so not false. Contradiction! Conclude: they are not both false. Thus, despite their symmetry, the no-no sentences must differ in truth-value. Such is the no-no paradox.” (Greenough 2011: 547)

Though there are substantial dissimilarities between the two arguments, the symmetry considerations play in both cases a crucial role. In fact, Equal Validity and Semantic Equal Validity are versions of symmetry theses.

utterance $\langle s,c \rangle$. Hence “ p is true relative to $\langle s,c \rangle$ ” means that the proposition p is true relative to the circumstances of evaluation identified by the utterance $\langle s,c \rangle$. Given these stipulations, here is the formal structure of the Equal Validity Paradox :

- 1 (1) $\langle s,c \rangle$ and $\langle s',c' \rangle$ are equally valid (Ass. - Equal Validity)
- 2 (2) If $\langle s,c \rangle$ and $\langle s',c' \rangle$ are equally valid, then $\langle s,c \rangle$ and $\langle s',c' \rangle$ have the same semantic status (Ass.–Semantic Equal Validity)
- 3 (3) If $\langle s,c \rangle$ and $\langle s',c' \rangle$ have the same semantic status, then they are both true (Ass–Truthfulness)
- 1,2,3 (4) $\langle s,c \rangle$ and $\langle s',c' \rangle$ are both true (Modus ponens:⁵ 1,2,3)
- 5 (5a) if $\langle s,c \rangle$ expresses a proposition– p –then ($\langle s,c \rangle$ is true only if p is true in $\text{circ}(\langle s,c \rangle)$) (Ass–Utterance-Propositional Truth Schema)
- 5 (5b) if $\langle s',c' \rangle$ expresses a proposition– q –then ($\langle s', c' \rangle$ is true only if q is true in $\text{circ}(\langle s',c' \rangle)$) (Ass–Utterance-Propositional Truth Schema)
- 6 (6a) $\langle s,c \rangle$ expresses a proposition– p (Ass- Propositionality)
- 6 (6b) $\langle s',c' \rangle$ expresses a proposition– q (Ass- Propositionality)

⁵ Strictly speaking, modus ponens is here applied two times (to 1 and 2 and then to the conclusion of the latter application and 3). For brevity we mention the just the principle and we refer to the relevant assumptions involved in two applications.

5,6 (7a) $\langle s,c \rangle$ is true only if p is true in $\text{circ}(\langle s,c \rangle)$ (Modus ponens: 5a, 6a)

5,6 (7b) $\langle s',c' \rangle$ is true only if q is true in $\text{circ}(\langle s',c' \rangle)$ (Modus ponens: 5b, 6b)

1,2,3,5,6 (7a) p is true in $\text{circ}(\langle s,c \rangle)$ (Modus ponens: 4, 6a)

1,2,3,5,6 (7b) q is true in $\text{circ}(\langle s',c' \rangle)$ (Modus ponens: 4, 6b)

8 (8) The circumstances of $\langle s,c \rangle$ - $\text{circ}(\langle s,c \rangle$)- are the circumstances of $\langle s',c' \rangle$ - $\text{circ}(\langle s',c' \rangle)$. (Ass-Sameness of circumstances)

9 (9) The proposition that q is the proposition that not-p (Ass - Contradiction)

1,2,3,5,6,8,9 (10) not-p is true in $\text{circ}(\langle s,c \rangle)$ (Substitutions of identicals: 7b, 8, 9)

1,2,3,5,6,8,9 (11) p is true in $\text{circ}(\langle s,c \rangle)$ and not-p is true in $\text{circ}(\langle s,c \rangle)$ (Introduction of conjunction: 7a, 10)

12 (12) Necessarily, for any circumstance C and proposition P, P and not-P are not both true in C (Ass - Law of Non-Contradiction)

1,2,3,5,6,8,9,12 (13) Contradiction (11,12)

The Equal Validity Paradox is thus generated by the following theses:

I) the yes-no utterances are equally valid (Equal Validity);

II) if the yes-no utterances are equally valid, then they have the same

semantic status (Semantic Equal Validity);

III) if the yes-no utterances have the same semantic status, then they are both true (Truthfulness);

IV) the alethic profile of the truth property for the yes-no-utterances and for the propositions expressed is governed by a scheme connecting utterance truth to propositional truth (Utterance-Propositional Truth Scheme);

V) the yes-no utterances express propositions (Propositionality);

VI) the yes-no utterances are related to the same circumstances of evaluation (Sameness of Circumstances);

VII) the propositions expressed by the yes-no-utterances are contradictory (Contradiction);

VIII) these propositions cannot both be true in the same circumstances (LNC).

Before moving to the possible solutions of the paradox, let us clarify the exact nature of the paradox and its relationship with the phenomenon of faultless disagreement. First, notice that the paradox kicks start with an arbitrary instance of yes-no-utterances. Remember that we have defined these utterances as those utterances that give rise to the phenomenon of faultless disagreement. So the first feature of the paradox is that it is structurally intertwined with the phenomenon of faultless disagreement. Second, notice that the eight principles that we have listed in relation to

the paradox have different natures. A first set of principles is specifically related to faultless disagreement and equal validity: Equal Validity, Truthfulness, Propositionality, Sameness of Circumstances and Contradiction belong to this first set. Equal Validity amounts to the claim that the class of utterances that give rise to the appearance faultless disagreement—i.e. yes-no-utterances—and that are equally valid is not empty. Semantic Equal Validity articulates the notion of equal validity for these utterances imposing a semantic reading. Truthfulness claims that if these utterances have the same semantic status they are true. Propositionality claims that these utterances are part of an area of discourse that expresses truth-conditional contents—i.e. propositions. Sameness of Circumstances claims that whenever two utterances give rise to the appearance of faultless disagreement they share the same circumstances of evaluation. Contradiction claims that utterances that give rise to the appearance of faultless disagreement express contradictory propositions. The remaining two principles are totally general and not specifically related to the yes-no-utterances. Utterances-Propositional Truth Schema articulates a general principle holding between utterance truth and propositional truth, and LNC expresses a property of propositions .

To sum up, we can say that a the Equal Validity Paradox is an argument that generates a contradiction by assuming that the set of utterances that give rise to the appearance of faultless disagreement can be

non-empty (principle I), and by constraining the properties of these utterances by means of five principles specifically related to faultless disagreement and equal validity (principles II, IV, V, VI, VII) together with two general principles about the truth properties of utterances and propositions (principles III and VIII).⁶

§2 Eight Ways Out of the Paradox

Corresponding to the eight theses that give rise to it, there are eight strategies for blocking the Equal Validity Paradox. Each strategy provides the basis for building an account of faultless disagreement.

The first strategy amounts to a revisionist approach to faultless disagreement. By denying Equal Validity, it follows that it is not the case the yes-no-utterances are equally valid. One way to implement this strategy is to hold a rampant form of realism: one utterance is true whereas the other is not true. There is thus a fact of the matter about who is right

⁶ Of course there are other principles involved in the argument (e.g. *modus ponens*), but we leave them aside because they are irrelevant for the point of the argument.

and no sense in which both disputants are entitled to hold on to their view. Realism, however, is not mandated by a revisionist approach to faultless disagreement, for in general any account that dispels the appearance of faultless disagreement by denying Equal Validity involves a revisionist approach to faultless disagreement. In fact, we will argue that all the remaining attempts to solve the Equal Validity Paradox fall back onto a revisionist approach to faultless disagreement—more on this later.

The second strategy tries to solve the Equal Validity Paradox by denying Semantic Equal Validity. A natural way to implement this strategy is to take a realist approach to disputes of inclination by holding that there is a fact of the matter about who is right in these disputes; however, contrary to the revisionism of strategy i), the realist approach is coupled with an account intended to vindicate the intuition of *epistemic* faultlessness. On this reading, the source of the paradox springs from the epistemic or rational standing of the thinkers and not from the semantic value of the judged propositions.

The third strategy is based on the denial of Truthfulness: the yes-no utterances have the same semantic status, but neither is true. Judgements related to disputes of inclination express propositions whose semantic value takes a third value other than true and false.

The fourth strategy obliterates the straightforward connection between utterance truth and propositional truth expressed by the Utterance-Propositional Truth Scheme. A yes-no-utterance can be correct

and can express a proposition, but it may be unsettled which proposition is expressed, and thus, *a fortiori*, it may be unsettled whether there is an proposition—expressed by the utterance—that is true at the circumstances of the context of utterance.

The fifth strategy abandons the idea that yes-no-utterances express propositional contents. This strategy is typically developed by means of a non-cognitive approach to disputes of inclination such as expressivism. To exemplify, assertions about what is tasty do not express propositions and lack truth-conditions, moreover no attitude of belief is involved with respect to these utterances but rather a non-cognitive attitude such as, for example, gustatory appreciation.

The sixth strategy is the route to a robust relativistic approach to faultless disagreement. If propositional truth is relativized to extra non standard parameters—e.g. standards of taste—, the same proposition can be true and false in the same world since it can be the case that two utterances in the same world identify different circumstances—e.g. different standards of taste. By denying Sameness of Circumstances two contradictory propositions can thus be both true since the circumstances of evaluation differ.

The penultimate route, the seventh, exemplifies another popular strategy, usually called “indexical contextualism”. According to this strategy the yes-no-utterances do not express contradictory propositions since different contextual aspects related to the two utterances partially

determine the contents which are semantically expressed. To exemplify: when Mary utters “Ginger is tasty” hidden indexical elements related to taste-aspects, e.g. the standard of taste salient for Mary, determine the expression of the proposition that ginger is tasty relative to Mary's standards. Since Jane's context of utterance selects a different standard, her utterance expresses the proposition that ginger is not tasty relative to Jane's standards, a proposition whose truth isn't incompatible with the truth of the proposition expressed by Mary's utterance.

The last route is to abandon the law of non-contradiction thus allowing the possibility that the yes-no-utterances express contradictory propositions that are nonetheless both true at the same circumstances. This route can be developed by means of the adoption of a paraconsistent account of subjective discourse that allows for the possibility of true contradictions in the actual world—i.e. dialetheism.

The plan of the paper is the following. In the next sections we provide the bare-bones of each of these eight routes and we sketch the main challenges that each of these strategies face. Strategies ii), vi) and vii) (realism, relativism and contextualism) are well-known options to block the Equal validity paradox, and their respective problems have been extensively explored in the relevant recent literature, we will thus be very brief in commenting on them and we will refer the reader to the relevant literature.

The remaining strategies—i.e. i), iii), iv), v) and viii)—have definitely

received less attention (if any) and we will treat them more extensively since they open new interesting routes to block the Equal validity paradox. More specifically, strategy i) (revisionism) allows to clarify an important, so far neglected, distinction between two basic opposite approaches to faultless disagreement: revisionary vs. descriptive approaches. Whereas a descriptive approach provides a “happy face solution”⁷ to the Equal Validity Paradox by identifying one (or more) faulty premise and by providing an explanation of its falsity and of its appearing otherwise, an “unhappy-face solution” to the Equal Validity Paradox reveals glitches of the concepts involved in the notion of faultless disagreement rather than mistakes in the articulation of this notion by means of some faulty premise. In fact, given that five⁸ of the principles involved in the Equal Validity Paradox articulate conceptual connections related to faultless disagreement, a potential reaction in relation to the paradox is to claim that the paradox shows that the concept of faultless disagreement is incoherent.

Strategies iii), iv), v) and viii) require the abandonment of some orthodox principles about truth and meaning: strategy iii) denies bivalence for utterance truth or for propositional truth by assigning a third semantic status to yes-no-utterances; strategy iv) renounces a straightforward

⁷ The term and the concept are borrowed from Schiffer (2003:196-98).

⁸ See *infra* end of previous section.

connection between utterance truth and propositional truth by invoking an indeterminacy in the semantic content expressed by the yes-no-utterances; strategy v) denies that yes-no-utterances express a truth-conditional content that is the object of the attitude of belief; finally, vi) calls for an exception to the law of non-contradiction. These latter strategies are less discussed in the recent literature on faultless disagreement, so we will provide a slightly more extensive treatment for them.

Our main thesis is that each of strategies ii)-viii) faces the challenge of being, contrary to its official aim, a form of revisionary approach to faultless disagreement. None of the following considerations in framing the revisionist challenge for each of these strategies is of course meant to provide a knock-down argument against these proposals taken as descriptive accounts of faultless disagreement. Our aim is simply to show that there is a well-grounded suspect that these solutions to the Equal Validity Paradox cannot but end up being revisionary with respect to the phenomenon of faultless disagreement, despite their official pronouncements.

§3 Revisionism

Strategy (i)—i.e. the denial of the equal validity for the yes-no utterances—amounts to a revisionist approach to the problem of faultless disagreement. According to the revisionist approach disputes of inclination

are motivated by a misguided view on the subject matter: when confronted with disputes of taste, for example, we wrongly think that both views are legitimate whereas the truth of the matter is that they are not. As a consequence, these disputes cannot be rationally sustained. At least one of the participants is wrong, even though we may not be able to tell which one is wrong. Hence, the only rationally responsible attitude would be to abstain from disputing. The Equal Validity Paradox would thus receive an unhappy-face solution, since the concept of faultless disagreement would turn out to be a defective and thus an empty concept. Of course not all empty concepts are defective. For example, it was believed that witches and ether existed, we no longer believe so now. It is plausible to claim that neither is a case of a defective concept, more simply we got the description of reality wrong. Now, according to the revisionist, the concept of faultless disagreement belongs to a different class of concepts: it is a concept that is empty in virtue of the very conceptual connections that (partly) constitute it. Given that these very same conceptual connections give rise to a contradiction—as exemplified by the Equal Validity Paradox—the concept is incoherent and thus defective and empty.

Such a radical stance on the problem denies the phenomenon we wish to account for, i.e. the intuition that subjective discourse has its own specificity. Of course, such a radical departure from our practice needs an articulated motivation. Strategies (ii)-(viii) can then be seen as attempts to solve the paradox without renouncing the idea that the concept of faultless

disagreement is coherent; for each of these latter strategies a descriptive account of faultless disagreement is possible—or so it seems.

Before turning to the remaining solutions to the paradox it is important to stress the dialectical role of the Equal Validity Paradox with respect to the problem of faultless disagreement. Going revisionary means that the Equal Validity Paradox shows that our practice of judging and disputing about subjective domains is intrinsically misguided: no account can make sense of it as a rational practice. The paradox is thus taken as a symptom of the defectiveness of the practice because a defective concept informs it. In contrast, a descriptive account saves the phenomenon by rejecting some theoretical thesis—i.e. theses (ii)-(viii)—involved in the paradox without thereby renouncing the coherence of the practice.

The challenge to any descriptive solution to the Equal Validity Paradox thus consists in the request to show that the theoretical revision invoked can indeed avoid a revisionary approach to the phenomenon. In other words, the challenge amounts to the request of showing that the rejection of any of theses (ii)-(viii) is consistent with the claim that yes-no-utterances are genuine cases of faultless disagreement. As already mentioned, the revisionary approach can be moderate or radical. Moderate revisionism invokes a “weak unhappy-face” solution to the Equal Validity Paradox, the revision amounts to the claim that there cannot be a happy-face solution, but that it is nonetheless possible to provide a suitable consistent revision of the concept of faultless disagreement. This revision

can be seen, for example, as analogous to the *explications* invoked by Rudolf Carnap: explications are revisions of some ordinary concepts that maintain some core conceptual traits of the *explicatum* as being at the same time more precise and, crucially, coherent (Carnap 1956, pp. 7-8). Tarski's definition of truth can be seen an example of explication of the notion of truth capable of avoiding semantic paradoxes (Tarski 1944). Radical revisionism, in contrast, invokes a *strong unhappy-face solution* to the Equal Validity Paradox: like its moderate cousin it holds that there cannot be a happy-face solution, but, contrary to the optimism of moderate revisionism, it denies that a consistent revision of the notion of faultless disagreement is possible.

In this paper we aim to show that the Equal Validity Paradox is a genuine *aporia* for any attempt—like (i)-(vii)—to fulfil a descriptive project with respect to the phenomenon of faultless disagreement.⁹

§4 Realism

Whereas realism can be employed as a way to implement the

⁹ Whether these putative descriptive projects have to fall back onto radical rather than moderate forms of revisionism is a question that we leave open in this work.

revisionist strategy, if coupled with an epistemic reading of faultlessness the realist doctrine can be used as a descriptive account of faultless disagreement. Such a descriptive project rejects semantic equal validity by accounting for equal validity in epistemic terms without abandoning classical semantics (Schafer 2011). The difficulties for a realist treatment are well-known: the price to pay in order to preserve classical semantics is to make room for the existence of a fact of the matter on subjective questions—such as whether or not a food is tasty—when it is hard to imagine what else, if not our judgements, could determine what counts as the correct answer. More importantly: if truth is so remotely connected to our practices of judgements, it is difficult to consider these practices as rationally sustainable when it comes to the activity of disputing (Wright 2001). If the truth-value of taste propositions is determined by aspects of reality that are beyond our ken, then it is hard to see how our judgements about taste matters can be responsibly held. At best we could say that we judge blamelessly because we cannot aspire to judge from a better epistemic position. But a blameless judgement is different from a justified judgement—or so it seems. So the challenge for the realist is to explain how propositions belonging to subjective discourse get their truth-value determined and why our judgements about them seem rational and justified.

§5 Analtheism

Strategy iii) takes a different route to the solution of the Equal Validity Paradox by denying the truthfulness of the yes-no utterances. So yes-no-utterances are not true but have nonetheless the same value. As we saw at the outset, if both utterances are false, there seems to be no prospect of making sense of the idea of faultlessness in semantic terms. Hence this route is committed to the idea these utterances enjoy a third semantic value different (and incompatible) with the polar values of truth and falsity. The attribution of a third semantic value is meant to be the expression of the thought that subjective discourse is semantically indeterminate and that the appearance of faultlessness springs from this indeterminacy. One way to develop the idea is to claim that the meaning of expressions featuring in subjective areas of discourse, together with non-semantic facts, underdetermines their extensions: the thoughts and practices of competent speakers and non-linguistic facts aren't enough to determine whether "Ginger is tasty" is true or false. A natural way to model this idea is to uphold a non-classical semantics that evaluates yes-no-utterances as neither true nor false. Following an entrenched terminology¹⁰ we can call this strategy: *analetheism* (Beall 2006). A major problem for the analetheist strategy is the potential tension between the thesis of semantic under-determination and the thesis of equal validity. In fact, if we stick to the orthodox view that we ought to assert and believe

¹⁰ The terminology goes back to Beall & Ripley (2004).

only what is true, yes-no utterances (and their respective beliefs) would count as incorrect. But then it becomes unclear in what sense, if any, both views on a dispute of inclination are equally valid if they are both incorrect—the threat of ending up being revisionary thus emerges also for option (iii).¹¹

¹¹ Beall (2006: 67) revises the norm for belief as: “one ought (rationally) to believe what is at least not false”, thus allowing propositions with truth-value gaps as objects of belief. That said, it remains to be explained why one ought to believe an untrue proposition whose third semantic value is interpreted as “at least not false”. If the untruth of this proposition is due to the absence of facts in the world, it seems that we cannot say that in believing we are representing something correctly. For to represent correctly amounts, intuitively, to believe a proposition that represents correctly an aspect of the world—say a state of affairs. Now, if indeterminacy is due to the meaning it shouldn't be the case that the propositions has determinate semantic status by assigning a third semantic value. So the assignment of a third semantic status seems to imply that the indeterminacy springs from non-linguistic facts, i.e. from the represented state of affairs (see also *infra* §5 the distinction between first-level indeterminacy and second-level indeterminacy and Smith 2008). As a consequence, if the state of affairs does not determinately hold, the representor -i.e. the belief- cannot be determinately correct. But if the belief is

§6 Semantic indeterminacy

Strategy iv) is difficult to assess since the link between utterance truth and propositional truth is hard to deny. Perhaps, one way to make sense of this strategy is to maintain that an utterance can semantically express more than one proposition leaving indeterminate which one it actually expresses.¹² It can thus be the case that there are at least two propositions that could be expressed by the utterance such that one is false while the other is true. The idea behind this strategy is thus the following: when Mary utters “Ginger is tasty” there are several candidate propositions that might be expressed and Mary’s utterance is true when at least one of these propositions is true—call this proposition *P*. Notice that this claim does not amount to saying that no proposition is expressed (hence 6a and 6b hold good), rather there is no fact of the matter as to which proposition is expressed. Assuming the existence of a proposition that is true among the candidate propositions and the thesis that an utterance is correct when *at least one* of these candidate propositions is true,¹³ it follows that while it is

not determinately correct, why ought one to believe it?

¹² Pravato (MS) exemplifies a similar strategy for normative discourse.

¹³ For those familiar with subvaluationist semantics: the idea is to frame the correctness with a mechanism analogous to subvaluations when it comes to

true that the utterance expresses a proposition, it is not true that it expresses a specific true proposition since there is no fact of the matter about which proposition the utterance expresses—hence the failure of 5a and 5b. Notice the difference between the indeterminacy invoked by strategy iii) and the one adopted by strategy iv): whereas the former is an indeterminacy regarding the truth-value of the proposition expressed, the latter is an indeterminacy concerning which proposition is expressed. Borrowing a piece of terminology from Eklund (2008) we can call the former *first-level indeterminacy* and the latter *second-level indeterminacy*. While analaesthetist claims that meaning facts, together with non-linguistic facts, determine a third semantic value for the sentence (and hence for the proposition expressed) since there is a best way to assign semantic value—i.e. neither truth nor false—to the sentence; the follower of strategy iv) claims instead that meaning facts do not determinate which proposition is expressed since there is no best way of assigning a semantic value to the sentence, for different ways of assigning a truth-value are admissible.

One basic worry concerning this sophisticated strategy is that it has difficulties in making sense of the faultlessness of the *beliefs* of two thinkers engaged in a dispute of inclination. For, what do they believe according to this proposal? If we stick to the standard view that belief is a relation between a thinker and a proposition, since there is no proposition

utterances. However, contrary to subvaluationism, no non-standard compositional semantics is invoked for *sentences*.

determinately expressed there is also no determinate belief, but if the belief has no determinate content, how can it be faultless to have it? It seems that the appropriate stance to have in this case is to withhold belief since any attempt to believe would fail to put the thinker in relation to a proposition among the available candidates. Agnosticism seems thus the mandated attitude in disputes of inclination, and thus the proposal seems to fall back onto a form of revisionism.

§7 Non cognitivism

Strategy v) rejects the idea that yes-no utterances express genuine propositions. This option falls naturally under a non-cognitivist account of subjective discourse. Traditionally, non cognitivism used to involve the semantic thesis according to which the targeted discourse isn't truth-apt and the psychological thesis that the attitudes expressed by utterances in this area of discourse do not express belief but some other kind of attitude.¹⁴ More recent non cognitivist theories have weakened the traditional thesis allowing for the truth-aptness of the targeted discourse by means of a deflationary reading of truth¹⁵, and by allowing that, though the primary role of utterances is not to express belief, they can express beliefs

¹⁴ See van Roojen (2009) for a useful overview on non-cognitivism.

¹⁵ The *locus classicus* is Blackburn's (1984) quasi-realism.

as a secondary function (Schroeder 2009). Historically expressivism has been the preferred route for escaping the Equal validity paradox: given that no genuine proposition is involved, there is no problem in making sense of the truth-conditions of yes-no utterances. So, in principle, a non-cognitivist could block the Equal Validity Paradox by denying Propositionality, while maintaining, at the same time, all other principles including Truthfulness—provided a deflationist understanding of truth is upheld.¹⁶

Well known problems afflict the non-cognitivist route. First and foremost the so-called Frege-Geach problem, namely the challenge of accounting for the validity of deductive arguments without using a truth-conditional semantics.¹⁷ A related problem, more pressing for any

¹⁶ Recent literature on faultless disagreement (Dreier 2009; Huevenes forthcoming; Marques forthcoming) is sympathetic to an expressivist (hence non cognitivist) account.

¹⁷ The problem in a nutshell is that sentences that express moral judgement, when they are embedded in sentences that are semantically complex, figure in non assertoric positions (e.g. antecedent of a conditional). However, expressivist theories cannot easily account for the contribution of sentences to the semantics of these complex sentences since the semantic value of sentences has been identified with the attitude expressed by that sentence; but when a

non-cognitivist account of faultless disagreement, is the possibility to express different embeddings of the negation operator relative to an expression of attitude.¹⁸ Here is a way to present the problem.¹⁹ Suppose the expressivist semantic analysis of “Ginger is tasty” is explained by the fact that it expresses gustatory appreciation:

Ginger is tasty iff APP(ginger)

where “APP” expresses that attitude of gustatory appreciation.

How should the expressivist analyse “Not-ginger is tasty”? Following the same line of analysis, it should be analysed as the gustatory appreciation of any food other than ginger:

Not-ginger is tasty iff APP(not-ginger)

Now consider the sentence “Ginger is not tasty”, which is relevant for the analysis of the yes-no-utterances. If we follow the non-cognitivist

sentence occurs unasserted in, for example, an antecedent of a conditional it seems wrong to analyse its semantic contribution as the expression of an attitude. A further challenge for the cognitivist, related to the account of logical validity, is offered by Dorr (2002).

¹⁸ The problem is raised in Unwin (1999, 2001).

¹⁹ The original formulation is related to moral discourse.

story, this sentence expresses an attitude different from belief, but which one?

Ginger is not tasty iff ?(ginger)

It does not seem that any attitude of appreciation can fill the gap. Hence “Ginger is not tasty” does not seem to express a state of appreciation. Since “Ginger is tasty” is inconsistent with “Ginger is not tasty”, it follows that the non-cognitivist cannot account for this inconsistency by means of the same type of conative attitude. It could be replied that we can find a second conative attitude to account for the inconsistency, for example, the attitude of disgust. “Ginger is not tasty” is thus analysed as the expression of disgust towards ginger:

Ginger is not tasty iff DISG(ginger)

where “DISG” expresses the attitude of gustatory disgust.

The non cognitivist can thus redeem the inconsistency by means of the idea of the incompatibility between two attitudes.

Two problems affect this solution, however. The first one is that it is debatable to account for a logical notion such as inconsistency by means of a psychological notion such as the impossibility of having simultaneously gustatory appreciation and gustatory disgust towards a

certain food. The second problem is that this way of accounting for the inconsistency commits the non-cognitivist to the existence of an infinity of attitudes. This latter fact stems from two facts: i) the fact that for each subjective predicate she needs to postulate ad hoc attitude as she has done for “tasty”; ii) the negation problem can be generalized. To explain this latter point we can represent the non-cognitivist solution to the negation as the postulation of a new attitude that would allow the non-cognitivist to express these three different acceptances:

Mary accepts that ginger is tasty iff Mary accepts APP(ginger)

Mary accepts that not-ginger is tasty iff Mary accepts APP(not-ginger)

Mary accepts that ginger is not tasty iff Mary accepts DISG(ginger)

Now, what about conjunction?

Mary accepts that ginger is tasty and Mary accept that rhubarb is tasty iff Mary accepts APP(ginger) and Mary accepts APP(rhubarb)

Mary accepts that ginger is tasty and that rhubarb is tasty iff Mary accepts ?

Mary accepts that ginger and rhubarb are tasty iff Mary accepts APP(ginger and rhubarb)

The non-cognitivist analysis lacks enough structure to mirror the differences in the syntactic structure of the three sentences. To fill in the gap it seems she needs to postulate a new attitude related to the conjunction, say “APP&”. The pattern generalizes with all logical connectives; and given that logical connectives combine each other to give rise to more logically complex sentences, the dimension of the set of the postulated new attitudes explodes.²⁰

To sum up, the challenge for any non-cognitivist solution to the Equal Validity Paradox is to abandon Propositionality without losing a grip on the notion of inconsistency and thus on that of disagreement. Without any account of why yes-no-utterances are cases of disagreement, non-cognitivists fail to offer a descriptive account of faultless disagreement, thus falling back onto revisionism.²¹

²⁰ See also Schroeder (2008a, 2008b). Some non-cognitivists (Gibbard 2003, Horgan and Timmons 2006) bite the bullet and accept this proliferation of attitudes.

²¹ Schroeder (2008b) has developed a sophisticated expressivist proposal capable of accounting for the negation problem. However, he distances himself from it due to the heavily implausibly complicated commitments that the proposal requires in logic and semantics.

§8 Relativism

Of the remaining ways out of the paradox, two of them—rejection of theses (VI) or (VII)—are well-known in the literature and for each of these routes there are well-founded doubts that they can actually avoid a revisionary approach to faultless disagreement.

Rejection of Sameness of Circumstances (strategy vi) involves some non-standard extra parametrization of the relation of propositional truth. The basic idea is that the truth of propositions involved in disputes of inclination requires some extra parameters in addition to possible worlds. The circumstances of evaluations involved in taste discourse, for example, involve standards of taste so that the proposition that ginger is tasty can be true relatively to Mary's standards of taste and false relatively to Jane's standards.²² The basic problem for this position is to account for the appearance of disagreement since a difference in the circumstances of evaluation seems to involve a difference in the what the yes-no utterances are meant to be about. If, as it seems, two utterances concerning the very

²² The basic form of relativism has been developed in two different strands: a moderate form invoking only this relativisation of propositional truth (known also as “non-indexical contextualism, see Kölbel 2004) and a more radical form invoking also the relativisation of utterance truth to contexts of assessments, contexts whereby the same utterance can be correctly evaluated in different ways (MacFarlane 2005, 2007).

same proposition with respect to different possible worlds cannot constitute a case of disagreement, it seems to follow that, if yes-no-utterances concern different circumstances of evaluation for assessing the same proposition, they cannot involve a genuine form of disagreement.²³ But if no genuine disagreement is in place, it seems that the only way to explain the dispute is that subjects fail to realize what the actual circumstances of evaluation relevant for their utterances are. Hence they fail to know what the truth-conditions of what they say actually are

²³ This objection concerns the relation between the circumstances of evaluation involved by the yes-no-utterances and question whether these utterances involve a genuine form of disagreement. As mentioned in the previous footnote, there are at least two varieties of relativism—non indexical contextualism and assessment-relativism—that have different consequences with respect to the correctness conditions of the yes-no-utterances. However, this difference is not relevant for our objection, since both forms of relativism are committed to the view that yes-no-utterances involve different circumstances of evaluation. The difference between non-indexical contextualism and assessment-relativism has consequences with respect to the problem of accounting for the idea of faultlessness, in fact truth-relativism does not seem to have a non-metalinguistic way to express the idea of faultlessness since from each perspective each subject is right is criticizing the opponent's view, so, there is no perspective in which both speakers, uttering two yes-no-utterances, are right. The only way to recover faultlessness is by means of a semantic ascent: each utterances is correct relative to the

and, assuming a truth-conditional account for meaning, they ignore the meaning of their utterances. The relativist strategy is then committed to a thesis of semantic blindness with respect to yes-no-utterances. It follows that the relativist strategy cannot offer a descriptive account of faultless disagreement, and that it is committed to a revisionary approach to the problem.

§9 Contextualism

Indexical contextualists deny that the same proposition is involved in disputes of inclination and thus uphold strategy vii). According to them, the semantic content of evaluative expressions such as “tasty” is sensitive to the context of use. When Mary utters “Ginger is tasty” she is actually expressing the proposition that ginger is tasty relative to *her* standards of taste, whereas Jane is say that ginger is not tasty relative to *her* standards, hence they are expressing compatible contents just like when two different people utter “I am cold” and “I am not cold”. Whether or not the contextualist semantic story is credible, the most pressing problem for this strategy is the difficulty of making sense of the idea of disagreement when the yes-no utterances are taken to express compatible contents. But if no

perspective of the speaker. It is fair to say that MacFarlane 2007 recognizes this fact and he seems prone to abandon the project of accounting for faultlessness.

genuine disagreement is in place, it seems that the only story that can explain a dispute is that subjects fail to realize what the relevant propositions expressed by their utterances are. Hence they fail to know the truth-conditions of what they say and, assuming a truth-conditional account for meaning, they end up ignoring the meaning of their utterances. Hence contextualists are in the same ballpark of relativists in being committed to a thesis of semantic blindness with respect to yes-no-utterances. It follows that also contextualism cannot offer a descriptive account of faultless disagreement, and that it is committed to a revisionary approach to the problem.²⁴

§10 Dialetheism

Lastly, strategy viii) calls for an exception to the law of non-contradiction: yes-no-utterances express propositions that are both true and false, hence being also true, they are both correct.

The main problem for this option is to offer an account of assertion that explains the appearance of disagreement for the yes-no-utterances.

A well-known way of making sense of the abandonment of LNC is the

²⁴ Lopez De Sa (2008) and Sundell (2011) offer sophisticated contextualist accounts of faultless disagreement. We argue in Coliva & Moruzzi ms-1 that even these sophisticated accounts are doomed to be revisionary.

adoption of a paraconsistent logic. Paraconsistent systems deny the so-called Explosion principle (aka “Scoto’s law” or “Ex falso quodlibet”) according to which from a contradiction any proposition follows, thus allowing one to devise ways to ‘contain’ or ‘limit’ the effects of the contradiction. Paraconsistent systems can be broadly divided into two families: weak and strong ones.²⁵ Weak paraconsistent logics do not allow for true contradictions, they simply tell us how to behave when confronted with a theory that contains a contradiction in order not to discard it completely (e.g. subvaluationism). Strong paraconsistent logics allow for the truth of contradictions, hence they properly deny LNC (e.g. dialethesim). Given that any account of faultless disagreement must deal with the truth of actual or possible utterances of contradictory propositions, strong paraconsistency seems required. Let’s call this proposal *dialetheist strategy*.

Whereas the driving thought of the analetheist strategy (strategy iii) is that subjective discourse is a case where yes-no-utterances take a third semantic value distinct from the polar values of truth and falsity, the dialetheist proposes a dual approach opting for idea that subjective discourse is a case of where yes-no-utterances take both polar semantic values: it is both true and false that ginger is tasty, hence LNC fails for the subjective domain.

Dialetheism allows one to say that in a dispute where A asserts P and B

²⁵ See Berto (2007) for an introduction.

denies P, A's and B's opposite judgments are actually contradictory, so no hidden or extra parameters are invoked to relativize yes-no utterance truth (as opposed to contextualism or truth-relativism); moreover it allows one to maintain that A's and B's judgments are equally valid (true contradictions).

Since the dialetheist does not face the problem of making sense of the idea that a contradiction is involved in a dispute on faultless disagreement, she avoids the problems that contextualist proposals face, while distancing herself also from truth-relativism by succeeding in making sense of equal validity. After all, truth-relativists have no way to make sense of the idea that relative to the same parameter, to which truth is relativized, both opinions are equally valid. However, the dialetheist strategy faces a certain number of challenges. In the following we will raise one we consider more pressing: the absence of any relativisation opens the way to a revisionary challenge to the proposal.

Consider again our yes-utterances: Mary says "Ginger is tasty" and Jane says "Ginger is not tasty". Let us apply dialetheism to them. Incompatibility between these utterances would fail: both parties should admit that also their opponent is right, not just from his own point of view, but *tout court*. Hence, they couldn't preserve disagreement and should thus admit that both contradictory propositions are true. They should therefore cease to quarrel since they should both recognize that also the other party is right. The dialetheist strategy thus collapses into a form of revisionary

of account of faultless disagreement instead of a being form of descriptive account.

This latter argument can be presented as a elaboration of a familiar problem for dialetheism (Parsons 1990, Batens 1990 and Priest 1995, 2006 pp. 106):

ARGUMENT 1

- 1) Suppose P is a *dialetheia*—i.e. P is both true and false (and A and B have evidence for this)
- 2) Suppose A asserts P;
- 3) B's typical of way of disputing with A is by asserting not-P
- 4) Yet if we accept dialetheism, B's assertion of not-P does not prevent her from also accepting P (if P is a *dialetheia*, P and its negation are both true);
- 5) Incompatibility between A and B's judgments is lost;
- 6) The dispute between A and B on P is not rationally sustainable.

In a nutshell the problem stemming from the unrelativized nature of the *dialetheia* is that once a proposition P is a *dialetheia* the mutual correctness of the acceptance of the proposition and of its negation does not seem to leave space for any substantial disagreement over P: both accepting P and rejecting P (meant as accepting not-P) are correct. So opposite attitudes over P do not seem to motivate any rational dispute. A

possible way out of this problem is to distinguish four possible notions Priest (2006a, pp.96-99; 2006b, p. 103):

Acceptance of P = mental state of believing P;
Assertion of P = the speech act expressing the act of accepting P
(stronger than agnosticism);
Rejection of P = mental state of refusing to believe P;
Denial of P = the speech act expressing the act of rejecting P.

Here is how Graham Priest explains these distinctions:

Someone who rejects A cannot simultaneously accept it any more than a person can simultaneously catch a bus and miss it, or win a game of chess and lose it. If a person is asked whether or not A, he can of course say 'Yes and no'. However this does not show that he both accepts and rejects A. It means that he accepts both A and its negation. Moreover a person can alternate between accepting and rejecting a claim. He can also be undecided as to which to do. But do both he cannot. (G. Priest 1989: 618)

Hence acceptance and rejection are exclusive (but not exhaustive, agnosticism is always a third possible stance). Familiar examples in which

these distinctions are applied are gappy sentences: given that a sentence can be untrue without being false, having ground for the denial of P and not-P does not ground, respectively, acceptance of not-P and of P. And, importantly, glutty sentences: given that a sentence can be false without being untrue, having ground for the acceptance of P and not-P does not ground, respectively, denial of not-P and of P. Priest's point (Vs Frege & Geach) is thus that denying P does not always involve asserting not-P.

Now let's assume this notion of rejection, at least for the sake of the argument, though it is unclear what the information that it is conveyed by a subject's denial is (Grim 2005; Berto 2008). A way to express incompatibility between attitudes can then be regained: A's acceptance of P excludes the correctness of B's rejection of P.

Given this distinction, we can state three different normative principles for rationality (Priest 2006b, p.110):

(Accept-T) One ought rationally to accept P if there is good evidence for the truth of P

(Accept-F) One ought rationally to accept not-P if there is good evidence for the falsity of P

(Reject-T) One ought rationally to reject P if there is good evidence for the untruth of P²⁶

²⁶ The opposition between acceptance of P and not-P and rejection of P expresses

Given these principles, can the challenge of collapsing onto revisionary relativism be met?

Unfortunately, it seems that the argument for the collapse of dialetheist strategy into revisionary strategy can still be presented as an extension of the familiar problem we have encountered before:

ARGUMENT 2

- 1) Suppose P is a *dialetheia*—i.e. P is both true and false (and A and B have evidence for this)
- 2) Suppose A asserts P
- 3) B's way of disputing with A is by rejecting P.
- 4) B's rejection of P prevents her from also accepting P (Incompatibility satisfied)
- 5) But since P is a *dialetheia*, B is wrong in rejecting P and she ought rationally not to reject it (ditto for A)
- 6) The dispute between A and B on P is neither faultless nor rationally sustainable.

The conclusion of argument 2 is thus worse than the conclusion of argument 1: not only we cannot make sense of the rationality of the dialetheist thought that falsity is not opposite to truth but a subspecies of it.

dispute, but B's rejection of P is also incorrect. Hence, faultlessness is lost. Therefore, a dispute on matters of inclination cannot be presented as involving rejection. However, the mere acceptance of P and of its negation does not justify any sense of genuine disagreement between subjects.

In conclusion, arguments 1 and 2 set up a dilemma for the dialetheist strategy: either a dispute between A and B involves A's acceptance of a proposition and B's mere acceptance of its negation; or else, it involves A's acceptance of a proposition opposed to B's rejection of it. If the former, the incompatibility between the correctness of subjects' attitude is lost and hence, if the dispute is rational, ignorance of the fact that the proposition is a *dialetheia* must be then imputed to subjects (they mistakenly take acceptance of the negation of the proposition to be equivalent to the rejection of it²⁷). If, on the other hand, the dispute between A and B involves A's acceptance and B's rejection of a proposition, B's rejection could be rational only insofar as she ignored that P is a *dialetheia*, for recognition that P is a *dialetheia* involves recognition that both P and not-P are true and hence that rejection of P and rejection of not-P are both incorrect.²⁸ In both cases the idea that the dispute is rationally conducted

²⁷ When the discourse is consistent rejection of a proposition is in fact equivalent to acceptance of its negation.

²⁸ What about A? Given that the proposition is a *dialetheia*, her acceptance would be correct. Would her disputing attitude be nonetheless rational? If A took herself to be in opposition to B because she believes the proposition to be true

and sustainable is at odds with the assumption that subjects have evidence that the relevant proposition is a *dialetheia*. So the dialetheist strategy is committed to a form of revisionism about faultless disagreement.

§ 11 Conclusions

The idea that disputes related to subjective domains (e.g. those expressed by the yes-no-utterances) are genuine cases of faultless disagreement leads to the Equal Validity Paradox. We have identified eight ways out of this paradox. Whereas one strategy (strategy i) is explicitly a revisionary account of faultless disagreement—i.e. an account that denies that the notion of faultless disagreement can have a non-empty extension—, the remaining seven strategies aspire to solve the Equal Validity Paradox by providing a descriptive account of faultless disagreement—i.e. an account that does justice to the idea that some disputes are genuine cases

she could be rational insofar she were to ignore that the proposition is a *dialetheia*. If, on the other hand, took herself to be in opposition to B because she has recognized B's rejection, then her disputing attitude could be rational even if she knew that the proposition is a *dialetheia*. In this latter case, however, the *point* of her disputing would be to oppose the improper *attitude* of B. The dispute would thus be not over a content but over an attitude on that content. Notice, however, that the original idea was that faultless disagreement is manifested in a dispute over the truth-value of a given propositional content.

of faultless disagreement.

However, we have argued that this latter aspiration is in danger of being frustrated by the fact that each of these seven putative descriptive accounts of faultless disagreement, once pressed, seem to face revisionary challenges. If these revisionary challenges cannot ultimately be met, the appearance of faultless disagreement must be recognized to be an illusion we must free ourselves from. The illusion has indeed proved to be so powerful as to motivate an array of descriptive accounts each of which has served as *agit prop* for the preferred flamboyant metaphysical and semantic idiosyncrasies. Perhaps more sophisticated developments of these putatively descriptive accounts may avoid the revisionary challenges proposed thus far²⁹. Perhaps not. Further reflection and debate will show whether our allegations will prove to be right. For now we think we have formulated a clear and significant challenge for any descriptive approach to faultless disagreement.

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²⁹ In Coliva & Moruzzi (ms 1) we argue that this is not the case for sophisticated forms of contextualism and relativism and in Coliva & Moruzzi (ms 2) we argue that this not the case for the dialetheist strategy.

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