

## *Cognitive Expressivism, Faultless Disagreement, and Absolute but Non-Objective Truth*

### *§0 Introduction*

I offer a new solution to the puzzle of faultless disagreement. Its essence is that truth for some domains of sentences is absolute but non-objective: so the objectivity of truth can come apart from the absoluteness of truth. I take faultless disagreement to be the following phenomenon illustrated by statements of taste. Smith asserts  $V$  below, savouring a salty dollop of black paste, and Jones denies  $V$ , shrinking from a proffered smearing:

$V$ : Vegemite is tasty.

Assuming that both assert sincerely, and clear-headedly in the light of their food preferences is either Smith or Jones in error here? I say that neither is in error. No epistemic principle is violated, no one has insufficient evidence for their claims, no norm governing assertion is flouted, such as asserting what is false. Furthermore, Smith and Jones are not confused in arguing with each other. In short, Smith and Jones are faultless in their disagreement. Not only is there no error with respect to truth—we cannot say either asserts something false or untrue—there is also no dialectical error—neither is wrong to dispute with the other. There is no truth- or dialectical error.

The phenomenon of faultless disagreement is puzzling since any attempt to find a theoretical basis for the claim that Smith and Jones make no truth-error seems to undermine the claim that they make no dialectical error. Let me explain. Assume that Smith and Jones use  $V$  to convey the same propositional content. If we affirm that they faultlessly disagree, we cannot also affirm bivalence for  $V$ :

$BV$ : Either  $V$  is true or false.

If we affirm  $BV$ , then we must admit that one of the two has committed an error, by saying something false. But, if we retract  $BV$ , how can we maintain that Smith and Jones's

engagement in debate is without error, since to debate requires assuming that there is a fact of the matter, and that surely involves commitment to bivalence? It seems that our means for removing truth-error—retraction of *BV*—leaves us with an unwanted attribution of dialectical error—how can we say that they rightly argue if we retract *BV*? In short, the denial of truth-error conflicts with the denial of dialectical error. Any solution to the problem of faultless disagreement has to resolve this conflict.

Some theorists think relativism about truth saves the phenomena of faultless disagreement. It doesn't. Relativism removes the truth-error, but does not remove the dialectical error.<sup>1</sup> According to the truth-relativist, statements of taste are only capable of truth relative to standards of taste of speakers. Thus, *V*, assuming Smith and Jones make no error about their standards, is true relative to Smith's standards, false relative to Jones'. So there is no error of truth. But now the problem of dialectical error arises. If there is only relative truth for taste-statements, why are Smith and Jones arguing against each other in the first place? Either they think they have the same standards, so there is error, or they think that non-relative truth is at stake—again, error. Moreover, how can we say they are in disagreement if only relative truth is in the offing? Smith describes reality relative to his taste standards, Jones the reality relative to her standards. They are not disagreeing about how things are, since there is no *how-things-are* across standards of taste to disagree about. So again there is error.

Another response to the puzzle of faultless disagreement is to give up the assumption that *V* in the mouths of the respective speakers Smith and Jones conveys the same proposition. We might hold that content indexicality is in operation.<sup>2</sup> On the crudest version of this view, Smith asserts that he likes Vegemite, and Jones asserts that she does not. This view allows us to say that both Smith and Jones are without truth-error—both their assertions can be true about their own food preferences. But the problem of dialectical error remains. Although Smith and Jones disagree with respect to gustatory attitude, they do not disagree

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<sup>1</sup> Truth-relativists include Koelbel (2002) and MacFarlane (2005), and Lasersohn (2005).

<sup>2</sup> Content Indexicality, or content relativism is discussed in Koelbel (2002), Lasersohn, (2005).

about how things are—they talk past each other. They must be deeply confused in having a debate with each other since there is no common subject matter for the debate.

Perhaps truth-relativism or content-indexicality in some modified form can solve the two-pronged problem of faultless disagreement I have outlined, and resolve the tension between denial of truth- and dialectical error. I will not dwell on this matter here. Instead, I want to explore a new path. Its essence, as I announced above, is that truth for some domains of sentences is absolute, but non-objective. At the core of this approach is a relativity thesis, but not one about truth, or content, but about *truth-aptness*. My solution needs a specific conceptual framework to work, which I call *cognitivist expressivism*.<sup>3</sup> Cognitivist expressivism accepts that statements of taste are truth-apt, at least relatively, and capable of appearing in genuine assertions and manifesting real beliefs. On the other hand, it denies that representational states with state-to-world direction of fit have any explanatory role in the analysis of assertion.

### *§1 Modes of Assertion and Relativity of Truth-Aptness*

Here in outline is the proposal. By *truth-apt* I mean the following: we judge that a sentence is truth-apt if and only if we judge it to be bivalent. We deny that a sentence is truth-apt if and only if we refrain from affirming bivalence for it. Refraining from bivalence does not mean affirming the negation of bivalence or affirming a truth-value gap. It means simply dropping bivalence. So to affirm *V*'s truth-aptness is to commit to *BV*, to deny its truth-aptness is to refrain from asserting *BV*, either publicly or privately.

My proposal is that truth-aptness is relative. It is relative to what I call *mode of assertion*. There are two modes of assertion: *objective* and *non-objective*. (Just what these are will be outlined in a moment.) Because the mode of assertion in play for speakers can change, speakers have a dynamic, fluctuating orientation to truth-aptness and thus bivalence—truth-aptness is not a static feature of sentences. A change in mode of assertion with respect to speakers' utterances is manifested in the phenomenon of *renunciation*. In

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<sup>3</sup> See Barker (2004, 2005, 2007, 2007a) for various stages of development of this framework.

renunciation speaker can go from one assertoric orientation (the non-objective mode) in which certain sentences  $S$  are truth-apt to another assertoric orientation (the objective mode) in which these sentences are no longer truth-apt. The solution I offer to the problem of faultless disagreement is that when a speaker  $X$  asserts that, say, Smith and Jones faultlessly disagree about  $V$ ,  $X$ 's assertion is in the objective mode, relative to which  $V$  and its negation are not truth-apt, so  $X$  must assert in this mode that there is no question of truth-error with regard to Smith and Jones's assertions. But  $X$  can nevertheless assert at the same time that Smith and Jones make no dialectical error, because, qua assertions *in the non-objective mode*, Smith and Jones's assertions are perfectly legitimate—they are simply not legitimate in the *objective-mode*. In short,  $X$ 's assertion that there is faultless disagreement is in the objective mode and about assertions in the non-objective mode. That's how the tension between denial of truth-error and the denial of dialectical error is resolved.

The success of this solution depends on the theory of modes of assertion. The idea of modes of assertion depends on a theory of assertion. Let us say, very roughly for now, that to assert is to utter a sentence *defending* a mental state. By *defending a mental state* I mean, very roughly, a disposition to provide reasons for the state.<sup>4</sup> Defending can be public or private—I am not assuming it is a public activity involving an audience, though it may be. I can assert privately to myself, and so defend something privately. We might think that, given a fixed body of evidence, and fixed epistemic standards, speakers would have sustained and stable dispositions to defend given mental states. The key idea in this paper is that this is not the case.

Assume fixed evidence and fixed epistemic standards. I suggest that for some mental states  $\Psi$ , speakers can go from being prepared to defend  $\Psi$  to dropping defence of  $\Psi$ , even to themselves, when the argumentative pressure from others, or even themselves, is sufficient. This dropping of a disposition to defend states is part of a phenomenon I call *renunciation*. In renunciation, a speaker at a certain point in a conversation, goes from sincerely and clear-headedly asserting a sentence  $S$ , so she sincerely defends the mental state  $\Psi$  associated by her

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<sup>4</sup> This is reminiscent of Brandom 1983.

with  $S$ , to a conversational stage in which she turns off her disposition to defend  $\Psi$ , but also her disposition to defend the mental states associated with any logical compound of  $S$  or of  $\langle S \rangle$  is true, such as *either  $\langle S \rangle$  is true or  $\langle S \rangle$  is false*. Renunciation is a kind of opting out of any dialectical relation to  $S$ . Renunciation in this sense implies that  $S$  ceases to be truth-apt for the speaker, since the speaker ceases to affirm bivalence for  $S$ .

Renunciation can take this form: Smith and Jones in the thick of arguing about Vegemite's tastiness, acknowledge there is no objective matter of fact at stake and withdraw from any stance about Vegemite's tastiness. This withdrawal from debate is not merely a decision to keep their opinions to themselves—though that might happen as well. Smith and Jones might angrily retreat to their respective corners, holding their opinions to themselves. In renunciation, by contrast, speakers cease even to hold their private opinions about taste, since for them, the relevant sentences cease to be bivalent. In renouncing, Smith and Jones retreat from any dialectical relation to their earlier practice—they cease to hold the sentences concerned to be truth-apt. Renunciation can happen even if no new evidence is presented to the speakers involved, and no shift of epistemic standards occurs.<sup>5</sup> It happens when it happens, because of a recognition of dialectical limits and a kind of tolerance about dispute. I am not proposing that it inevitably happens in arguments about taste. Rather my claim is that it may happen, and its happening is not alien to our sense of what's at stake.

We can now define the two modes of assertion I have alluded to in terms of renunciation. A speaker makes assertions in the objective mode when their assertions are restricted to sentences whose assertion they will never renounce. Non-objective assertion is assertion where there is no such restriction. For a given, speaker the sentences assertable in the objective mode form a sub-set of the set assertable in the non-objective mode. So the objective mode represents a kind of partial retreat from the field of assertion. The two modes of assertion, objective and non-objective, both involve the same activity of defending mental

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<sup>5</sup> It is not an implication of the present view that where the truth of a given sentence  $S$  is verification transcendent, and so we cannot defend the state  $\Psi$  of  $S$ , or  $S$ 's negation, that  $S$  ceases to be truth-apt for us. Merely to find that  $S$ 's truth is verification transcendent does not trigger any renunciation in relation to  $S$ .

states. So both really are assertions—it is not that non-objective assertions are only apparent or quasi assertions.

For most of us, assertions performable in the objective mode include statements about mathematics, scientific facts, and most facts about the physical world. At least some taste-statements for some speakers are assertions that for those speakers will only be performable in the non-objective mode.

In renunciation, speakers' assertoric practice moves from the non-objective mode to the objective mode. Hence, the set of sentences they are prepared to assert shrinks, and at least some of the sentences they were asserting earlier become non-truth-apt for them. When Smith and Jones move from a non-objective mode to an objective mode, and so cease to view their earlier assertions of  $V$  and its negation as truth-apt, there is no implication that they must think they were wrong to engage in the earlier assertions. As assertions *per se* Smith's earlier assertion of  $V$ , Jones's earlier assertion of  $V$ 's negation, are fine. There was no epistemic or normative problem with them. Of course, Smith and Jones, in their shift to the objective mode, must refrain from these assertions *in that mode*, since to be in the objective mode is to confine oneself to defending states that one is prepared to defend come what may. So assertions of  $V$  and its negation, etc, are excluded. So, Smith and Jones must say that they cannot assert  $V$  or its negation etc, in this mode, and so these sentences are not truth-apt (claim made from the objective mode) but these utterances are legitimate assertions in the non-objective mode, relative to which they *are* truth-apt. Smith and Jones's assertions of  $V$  and its negation are fine, and truth-apt, qua non-objective mode assertions, but not truth-apt qua objective-mode assertions.<sup>6</sup>

The solution to the two-pronged problem of faultless disagreement as outlined is in implicit in what has been claimed. The judgement that Smith and Jones faultlessly disagree is made in the objective mode, relative to which  $V$  is not truth-apt, securing us Smith and Jones's freedom from any attribution of truth-error. Yet at the same time, we can affirm,

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<sup>6</sup> It is not an implication of the present view that Vegemite goes from being tasty for Smith, in the non-objective mode, to being not tasty in the objective-mode, so that tastiness is dependent on assertoric context.  $V$  and its negation, etc, are not truth-apt in the non-objective mode, so one cannot assert in that mode that Vegemite is not tasty.

within the objective-mode stance, that Smith and Jones are free from dialectical error, since we can assert that Smith and Jones's assertions are fine as assertions in the non-objective mode. The faultless disagreement claim straddles the two modes of assertion. The *we-cannot-speak-of-truth-error* claim is made in the objective mode, and the no-dialectical-error claim is made in the objective-mode by noting the probity of the speech acts of the disputants performed in the non-objective mode. In short, relativity of truth-aptness enables us to remove both truth- and dialectical error without tension.

This solution does not require that Smith and Jones, of whom the faultless disagreement claim is made, are making their assertions in the non-objective mode from their perspective. It could be that they themselves conceive of their debate as an objective one, so their assertions are in the objective mode. Nevertheless, we as observers can inhabit an objective-mode stance, in which for us  $V$  and its negation are only assertable in the non-objective mode. We can still say Smith and Jones faultlessly disagree to this extent—taken as non-objective assertions their assertive activity is fine. But, in this case, we also judge Smith and Jones to be in error. Their error is that of mistaken objectivity. They are wrong to treat the question of  $V$ 's truth as an objective matter.

In sum, the claim that Smith and Jones faultlessly disagree is an assertion in the objective mode about assertions taken as non-objective mode assertions. Freedom from truth-error arises from retraction of bivalence for  $V$  in the objective mode, and freedom from dialectical error arises from recognition that the practice is legitimate as non-objective mode assertion. I am not assuming that speakers conceptualize matters in these terms. The distinction objective/non-objective mode is theoretical, and describes patterns of practice unconsciously engaged in by speakers. It does not present us with a vocabulary that they, the speakers, in fact use. Nevertheless, speakers use a term, *objective*, which, I shall argue, is best theorized as reflecting the modes of practice that I have called the objective-mode and non-objective-mode assertion.

Within the framework I am proposing, truth-ascriptions are always absolute. It is not that  $V$  is true relative to the non-objective mode, and not true relative to the objective mode. What's relative to modes is truth-aptness. We can also say that assertability is relative to

mode in the sense that, given their preferences,  $V$  is assertable for Smith, and  $V$ 's negation is assertable for Jones, in the non-objective mode, but not in the objective mode.<sup>7</sup>

The framework of modes of assertion that I have described allows us to say that all truth is objective. The truth of propositions does not vary across modes or anything else. Truth, however, can be objective or non-objective. We do not provide an elucidation of the distinction between objective and non-objective truth by providing a theory of truth and objectivity. It is better understood by looking at truth-attributions. We assign objective truth when we are within the objective mode of assertion, and our truth-ascriptions are in that mode. Or in other words, our assignments of objective truth are those truth-assignments in the non-objective mode that can survive into the objective mode of assertion. Those that can survive the change of mode are attributions of non-objective truth. Before renouncing their assertions of  $V$ , Smith asserts that  $V$  is true, and does so in the non-objective mode. This assertion is an attribution of non-objective truth.

## §2 *Cognitivist Expressivism*

That, in outline, is my solution to the two-pronged problem of faultless disagreement. It depends critically on the idea that truth-aptness is relative to modes of assertion. That idea in turn depends on a conception of assertion. That conception, sketched somewhat vaguely, was that in an assertion a speaker utters a sentence, privately or publicly, and defends a mental state  $\Psi$ . I said, roughly, that to defend a state  $\Psi$  is to be disposed to provide reasons for  $\Psi$ . The relativity of truth-aptness to a mode of assertion worked this way:  $S$  ceases to be truth-apt for a speaker  $U$ , when, in renunciation,  $U$  goes from defending  $\Psi$  in an assertion of  $S$  to a stage in which  $U$  turns off the disposition to defend  $\Psi$  and related mental states—crucially, that mental state defended in assertion of bivalence for  $S$ . This idea, however, only works if we make the following assumption: the mental states defended in assertions are not themselves truth-apt states, like, for example, belief-states. Let's see why.

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<sup>7</sup> I do not analyze all faultless disagreement in terms of modes. Faultless disagreement featuring epistemic modals and adverbials is explained by other features of the cognitivist-expressivist framework to be described below. See Barker (2004).



Suppose that in an assertion or denial of  $V$ , one defends a belief state. A belief is a truth-apt state. After speakers turn off their defensive stance in relation to their respective belief states—for Smith, the belief that vegemite is tasty in Smith, for Jones, that it is not tasty—the belief-states would still be present. Since these are truth-apt states, we could still say that Smith's belief that vegemite is tasty is true or false and likewise for Jones's belief. But then how could the truth-aptness of  $V$  and its negation have disappeared? It would be very odd—indeed Moorishly paradoxical—to assert that  $V$  is not truth-apt yet the belief that vegemite is tasty is either true or false.

If the relativist conception of truth-aptness is to be maintained, we have to propose, that the states defended in assertions are not truth-apt in themselves, but truth-aptness emerges from the defensive orientation to the states concerned. It must be that what's truth-apt is  $S$  used with a defensive stance. The state defended, in other words, is not itself truth-apt. If that is right, turning off the defensive stance can lead to a failure of bivalence.  $V$  without any defensive stance will cease to be bivalent, since all defensive stances to the associated state are turned off, and no belief-state is there to embarrass our denial of its truth-aptness.

Note what we have just said. The mental state defended in assertion is not a truth-apt doxastic (belief) state. It is something else. This idea is reminiscent of a family of views you should be familiar with: *expressivism*. Moral expressivists hold that in asserting *Bob is good* a speaker expresses an attitude to Bob. The mental state underpinning the assertion—an affective state—is not a belief-state. It lacks state-to-world direction of fit. Similarly, we suppose that in producing  $V$ , Smith expresses a gustatory preference state. That state is not truth-apt. It lacks state-to-world direction of fit. So, the view we need to get the truth-aptness relativity thesis going is an expressivist conception of assertion.

However, there is a concern about using expressivism in this context. Some theorists think that expressivists must deny that value-sentences are truth-apt, since they express non-truth-apt states. We, however, want sentences like  $V$  to be truth-apt, in the non-objective mode, then to lose that truth-aptness in the objective mode. But where does the truth-aptness of  $V$  in the non-objective mode come from, if a non-truth-apt state is expressed? The concern



generally, have no explanatory role in the account of what assertion is.<sup>8</sup> This may seem rather a lot to swallow just to deal with the problem of faultless disagreement. That depends on how deep you think the problem is. I am not going to consider what the balance of costs and benefits are for my approach. I am just going to outline what it is and how much we have to cut away from the orthodox conception of truth, representation, and belief to make it work.

What then is belief, according to cognitive expressivism? One option, perhaps not the most attractive, is that beliefs are dispositions to defend  $\Pi$ -states that are actually possessed by the speaker. The defence does not have to be public, which means beliefs can be private matters. On this conception of belief, we can still say that assertions *express* beliefs in the sense that assertions can be manifestations of belief, but that is not part of the analysis of what assertion is. One way or another, assertion, belief, and judgement—which we can think of as non-public assertion—are all on a similar explanatory level in relation to an underlying substructure, of pre-doxastic mental states and their relations.

Indeed, the relativity of truth-aptness view entails that assertion and belief are at the same explanatory level as *Cog-Exp* indicates. Just as we speak of non-objective and objective assertion, we should speak of something comparable for belief. With my salt-file friends, in the non-objective mode, I believe that Vegemite is tasty, but in renouncing in a debate over Vegemite, and conceding, in the objective mode, that one cannot speak of a fact of the matter, I cannot at the moment be said to *believe* that Vegemite is tasty. There is a form of Moorean paradoxicality in saying *I cannot say that it is true that Vegemite is tasty, but I believe it is*.<sup>9</sup> If so, it seems that in renouncing assertion of  $V$ , I must also be renouncing belief that  $V$  is true.

Does this mean that belief is being portrayed as voluntary in some objectionable way? No. The fundamental involuntary aspect of belief remains. This resides in the  $\Pi$ -states that speakers token in their underlying mental systems. These states are the result of interaction

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<sup>8</sup> Some who believe in Minimalist Semantics, and the disciplined syntacticism of Wright (1992) will think that truth-aptness is a syntactic property, and furthermore, a minimal assertion and belief can be defined. See Blackburn 1998. I deny this view works—see Barker 2007a.

<sup>9</sup> Under circumstances of renunciation, we do say things like *Vegemite is tasty for me*. The *for-me* locution is just that device we use to convey that were a non-objective mode of assertion in play, one would assert or believe that Vegemite is tasty, and also to convey that one does not believe it objectively.

with the world ultimately through evidential pathways of various kinds. However, the defending of some of these  $\Pi$ -states, such as certain taste-preference states, is voluntary to the extent that argumentative pressure may issue in turning off, at least temporarily, the disposition to defend the states. When that turning off happens, in renunciation, both assertion, truth-aptness, and belief, temporarily at least, leave the scene.

So the relativity-of-truth-aptness conception requires that we think of assertion and belief as acts and states that arise from defence of  $\Pi$ -states, which are in themselves predoxastic and non-truth-apt. But now another objection arises. Defending involves a disposition to provide *reasons* for the  $\Pi$ -state associated with the sentence. But relations of reason, one might object, hold between contentful states, at least some of which are truth-apt. If that's right, the idea of defence, as potential reason giving, does not sit well with the idea that what we defend are  $\Pi$ -states. My response to this problem is that the conception of assertion so far in play is heuristic. It enabled us to introduce the idea of mode of assertion. But it's not quite right. To get to the theory of assertion that is closer to reality, we need to go further into the terrain of cognitivist expressivism.

### *§3 Assertion and its Mental Antecedents*

We do not have to sketch cognitive expressivism in any detail here to get to this theory of assertion—see Barker 2004, 2007a. We just need to say something more about  $\Pi$ -states and the relations into which they enter. At this point, we embark upon a speculative enterprise, not dissimilar in type to the speculations that proponents of Fodor's language of thought hypothesis offer about the nature of an underlying mental system. Unlike Fodor's language of thought hypothesis, we are not proposing that the underlying system is representational, in the sense of having mental states with state-to-world direction of fit. We are giving up the idea that representation, in this sense, has an explanatory role, in a primitive or reduced form, in the account of assertion or belief. This does not mean we deny that representation exists. Representation exists. There are truth-apt sentences, which possess truth-conditions. It's just that representation has no explanatory role in the account of assertion.

So here is the general picture: underlying the performance of any assertion is a network of  $\Pi$ -states. The  $\Pi$ -states are functional states that have their origins, or *canonical causes*, in the outputs of different faculties of mind: these faculties include, affect, perception, the inner operations that underpin reasoning, capacities that relate to the speaker manipulation repertoires in relation to its environment, and so on. The  $\Pi$ -states are linked not only to various canonical causes but also to each other. The linkages are cognitive laws.

Let's begin with the idea that  $\Pi$ -states are functional states whose canonical causes are outputs of faculties of mind. Consider the basic expressivist idea that in uttering a moral statement a person expresses an affective state. There are strong reasons to think this is false. Psychopath Frank has gained a moral belief that what he is doing is wrong, but he lacks the affective state, a kind of disapproval state, that we, non-psychopaths, express when we say murder is wrong. Frank's assertion that murder is wrong is sincere and clear-headed, but it's based purely on the testimony of others. He expresses no affective state. How does the expressivist deal with this case? The response I urge is that Frank is expressing a pre-doxastic state, a  $\Pi$ -state. It's just not an affective state. Instead, the  $\Pi$ -state is a state that, canonically, is caused by an affective state. In Frank's case, since he lacks the affective state, the  $\Pi$ -state is not the result of his tokening the canonical cause. The path through which the  $\Pi$ -state is tokened in his cognitive system is testimony. Other speakers make moral assertions that he believes. The testimonial chain supervenes on a process that involves his cognition of the speech of others leading to tokening of a  $\Pi$ -state in Fred's system, which he defends in assertion of *Murder is wrong*.<sup>10</sup> This  $\Pi$ -state is *cool* in the sense that, in itself, it has no affective dimension. The  $\Pi$ -states expressed by the non-psychopaths, asserting *Murder is wrong*, are also *cool*, it's just that they can also be said to express affective states, since, in their cases, the  $\Pi$ -states they token are caused by their canonical causes.

Frank's case is meant to illustrate the idea that  $\Pi$ -states are functional states, of a somewhat abstract character, whose canonical causes are outputs of mental faculties or

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<sup>10</sup> So technically, cognitivist expressivism is externalist about the relation between motivation and value judgment.

modules, such as the affective system. There are other sub-systems, such as the perceptual system, and so other kinds of  $\Pi$ -states.<sup>11</sup>

$\Pi$ -states can be compound. In asserting *Not-S*, a speaker defends *rejection* of the  $\Pi$ -state  $\Psi$  for *S*. Rejection of  $\Psi$  is a kind of compound  $\Pi$ -state. Its functional characteristics include the feature that the cognitive system cannot token both rejection of  $\Psi$  and  $\Psi$  itself. Though there is more to rejection than this functional incompatibility—see Barker 2007a. Comparable kinds of complex  $\Pi$ -states are defended in assertion of other compounds, like disjunctions.

$\Pi$ -states are not linked by reasons. That is the wrong level of description. They are linked by what we might call the mental antecedents of reason-claims. Take modus ponens (*MP*). With the appropriate priming and education, we find modus ponens right. *MP*'s rightness for us remains stable, unless we suffer some mental trauma. What underpins our intuition of its rightness? At the sub-doxastic level, U's mind contains a sub-system that processes  $\Pi$ -states. Its processing involves extracting causal consequences from given tokened states. Logical intuition is based on the detection of regularities in which a  $\Pi$ -state  $\Gamma$  is extractable as a causal consequence from another  $\Pi$ -state, or group of  $\Pi$ -states,  $\Phi$ , purely in virtue of the intrinsic structural and causal powers of  $\Phi$  and  $\Gamma$ . Call this a *C-law*. The *C-law* that explains the stability of the intuition for *MP*,

*S, If S, R. Therefore R,*

is the fact that the  $\Pi$ -states of *S* and *if S, R* generate as an intrinsic causal consequence the  $\Pi$ -state of *R*. Speakers are not perfect logical reasoners. So the sub-system that detects *C-laws* is fallible.

The canonical cause for the  $\Pi$ -states of claims about validity and entailment are states whose canonical causes are outputs of that internal system directed towards detecting *C-laws*.

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<sup>11</sup> You may wonder, what determines, for example, that Frank's sentence means the same as those of the affectively activated speakers. Cognitive expressivism offers no theory of meaning or content. It offers instead an expressivist theory of meaning- and content-attribution, which is meant to allay anxieties about *meaning-the-same*. See Barker (2007a) for details.

Cognitive expressivism offers no theory about validity. Since, there is no denial that value-sentences, or any other declarative sentences, are inherently non-truth-apt, we could just accept the standard claims about validity.

We are now in a position to sketch approximately the right theory of assertion without appeal to reason, which is the following:

**Assertion:** U performs an assertion iff U produces a sentence  $S$  signalling a disposition to indicate the C-law grounding architecture of a  $\Pi$ -state  $\Psi$ .

The  $\Pi$ -state  $\Psi$  is the one correlated in her system with  $S$ . The grounding architecture is the network of other  $\Pi$ -states and canonical causes linked by C-laws to  $\Psi$ . This architecture, which is internal, can be manifested by pointings, or other assertions, that, at the phenomenal level, we would say *provide reasons*. But reason and inference, as such, do not have an explanatory role in the account.<sup>12</sup>

#### *§4 Modes of Assertion Again*

This theory of assertion and the cognitive-expressivist framework provides a foundation for our solution to the two-pronged problem of faultless disagreement. Assertion is an act requiring two features of cognitive life. It requires a cognitive substructure—a network of  $\Pi$ -states and other states in C-law relations—and a superstructure, which is the defence of this grounding architecture. Both belief and assertion are at this superstructural level: both are tied to inner or outer voicings of the grounding architecture of  $\Pi$ -states.

Deception (or confusion) occurs when the speaker U has the superstructure without relevant parts of the substructure. In renunciation, U has the substructure but loses the superstructure. In U's system, the  $\Pi$ -states and C-law grounding relations all remain in place. What changes is U's disposition to defend  $\Pi$ -states in relation to a given sentence  $S$ . It disappears not simply for  $\Psi$ , the  $\Pi$ -state for  $S$ , but for all  $\Pi$ -states of logical compounds of  $S$  and  $\langle S \rangle$  is true. So, in particular, the dispositions to defend the  $\Pi$ -states for *either  $S$  or not- $S$*

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<sup>12</sup> Obviously, we should say more about what *signalling* is. We also need to explain what goes on when sentences are embedded. See Barker 2004, 2007a for a detailed discussion of these matters.

and *either <S> is true or <S> is false* go. So, in the objective mode, U refrains from asserting bivalence for *S*. Since  $\Pi$ -states are non-truth apt, there is no embarrassment of the kind that would arise if  $\Pi$ -state were beliefs and thus truth-apt.

This theory of modes of assertion is not prescriptive. It tells us rather that when judgements of faultless disagreement occur, objective and non-objective modes of assertion must be in operation. But which domains of assertion ought to be objective is not entailed by the theory. Assertions in the objective-mode are often assertions about the physical world, about the states and existence of ordinary objects, about facts of science and mathematics. We should not necessarily affirm, however, that only value-claims are in the domain that might exhibit non-objectivity. Perhaps some speakers will assert some assertions about the physical world only in the non-objective mode. In making the claim that *S* is objectively true, we express a disposition to assert *that S is true* in the objective mode. What's objective is itself open to dispute. There may even be faultless disagreement about that. So assertions about what is objective may sometimes be in the non-objective mode.

For a given speaker,  $\Pi$ -states are divided into those whose corresponding assertions speakers will tend to renounce and those they will never renounce. I deny that this reflects some muted sense of a distinction between the non-representational and representational parts of their language, or those that make contact with reality and those that don't. I assume that the distinction does reflect differences in the kinds of  $\Pi$ -states defended, for example, affect-based versus perception-based states. But both are in contact with reality. Moreover, representation does not have to be brought in to explain this contact.

An assertion that Smith and Jones faultlessly disagree in relation to *V* is an assertion in the objective mode. Freedom from attribution of truth-error is vouchsafed by *V*'s lacking truth-aptness in that mode. Freedom from dialectical error is vouchsafed by the fact that in the objective mode we can assert about Smith and Jones's assertions (*V* and its negation, etc) are legitimate speech-acts in the non-objective. From the objective mode, we cannot speak of a how-things-are with respect to the tastiness of Vegemite, yet we can say that Smith and Jones disagree about how things are (regarding Vegemite.) That's because we can say, in the objective mode, *AT*:



*AT*: Smith and Jones are directed towards making claims about how things are absolutely. They aim at absolute truth.

In *AT*, *how things are*, is in an intentional context. Assertion of *AT* in the objective mode does not commit us to affirming bivalence for *V*. What makes *AT* true is the fact that Smith and Jones really are performing assertions.

You may wonder whether from the objective mode, we can assert that there is no fact of the matter about Vegemite's tastiness. Strictly speaking we cannot assert this. Rather, we should assert: *we cannot say there is fact of the matter*. In other words, we can assert in the objective mode: *we cannot speak of truth or fact here*.

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