The Grammatological Problem

This first chapter grapples with a long-standing, oft-repeated problem for metaethical nondescriptivism. The problem is that there is tremendous overlap between the grammatical and logical properties of declarative sentences with moral predicates (i.e. moral judgments, like 'stealing is wrong'), and declarative sentences with ordinary descriptive predicates (i.e. ordinary descriptive judgments, like 'grass is green').[1] The challenge is to explain *why* this is true. More exactly, it is the challenge of saying what it is that moral and ordinary descriptive judgments have in common, in virtue of which they have so many of the same grammatical and logical properties.[2]

The descriptivists' answer is simple and straightforward: moral judgments, like ordinary descriptive judgments, are descriptive. In other words, both are typically used to make factual

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[1] Mark Schroeder (2008) goes as far as to say that "*every* natural-language construction that admits of descriptive predicates admits of moral predicates, and seems to function in precisely the same way[.]" (p.5)

[2] Following a time-honored tradition in metaethics, I use 'judgment' as an impartial term for declarative sentences, in order to explicitly remain neutral between the view that declarative sentences with moral predicates (e.g.'stealing is wrong') are typically used to make factual statements (viz. descriptivism), and the view that such sentences are not typically used to make factual statements (viz. nondescriptivism).

For there to be a substantive debate between these two views, it is necessary to use a neutral term for declarative sentences, such as 'judgment.' This is because declarative sentences are often simply defined as sentences which are used to make factual statements (in order to more easily differentiate them from interrogative sentences, which are used to ask questions, and imperative sentences, which are used to issue commands). However helpful this introductory definition is, it evidently begs the question about which speech act 'stealing is wrong' is typically used to perform.

It is therefore necessary to use a neutral term – like 'judgment' – which is otherwise synonymous with 'declarative sentence,' with one important difference: by stipulation, it is an open question whether judgments (i.e. sentences with the subject-copula-predicate syntax of declarative sentences, ending in a period or exclamation mark) are always used to make factual statements.

To be sure, philosophers sometimes use 'judgment' akin to 'belief,' in order to refer to a person's psychological commitment to, or firm acceptance of a proposition. When it is necessary to do so, I exclusively use 'belief,' and reserve 'judgment' for my discussion of the grammatical and logical properties of declarative sentences.

statements.[3] It is much more difficult to see how nondescriptivists should respond. They cannot claim that both moral and ordinary descriptive judgments are nondescriptive, since the latter are plainly descriptive. Nor can they, as the earliest nondescriptivists sometimes did, dismiss the overlap as "misleading" or "ingenuine."[4] For this is tantamount to saying there is no reason why moral and ordinary descriptive judgments share such similar grammatical and logical properties, and that is remarkably implausible. For these reasons, the extensive overlap between moral and ordinary descriptive judgments is widely regarded as a serious challenge to nondescriptivism.[5] I refer to this challenge as the *grammatological problem*.

Until recently, descriptivists and nondescriptivists alike treated this problem as identical to (or at least redundant with) the long-standing difficulty nondescriptivists have had explaining the compositional structure of moral language without invoking truth-conditional meaning. Sometimes called the "Frege-Geach problem," and other times the "embedding problem," I refer to it as the *compositional problem*. In Section 1.1, I briefly review the compositional and grammatological problems in order to make clear how they differ.

In Section 1.2, I expand the scope of the grammatological problem. As I show, taste judgments (e.g. 'sushi is delicious') exhibit each of the grammatical and logical properties that moral and ordinary descriptive judgments share. The expanded challenge, then, is to say what all three types of judgment have in common, in virtue of which they display these properties. The main upshot of this expanded version of the grammatological problem is that the descriptivists'

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[3] This sense of 'descriptive' is the one according to which even mathematical judgments are descriptive, since mathematical judgments are typically used to make factual statements. The term 'descriptive' is sometimes used more narrowly (as for instance, by Glassen (1959)) to mean 'empirical.' Mathematical judgments are not empirical, and hence, *in Glassen's narrower sense*, are nondescriptive. This is not the sense of 'descriptive' which concerns me here.

[4] See Carnap (1935, pp.24-25) and Ayer (1936, p.108).

[5] Contemporary descriptivists like Richard Joyce (2001), Michael Huemer (2005), and Mark Schroeder (2008, 2010) each highlight the tremendous overlap between the grammatical and logical properties of ordinary descriptive judgments and moral judgments, and count it among the most pressing difficulties for nondescriptivism.

Contemporary nondescriptivists like Simon Blackburn (1984, 1988), Allan Gibbard (1990, 2003), Terry Horgan, and Mark Timmons (2000, 2006) each acknowledge the need to explain (and then proceed by trying to explain) how it is that moral judgments have so many of the grammatical and logical properties which ordinary descriptive judgments do if moral judgments are (as they claim) nondescriptive.

answer to the problem no longer looks so appealing. Taste judgments, I argue, are *prima facie* nondescriptive – a presumption I develop and defend over the course of Part II (i.e. *Chapters 2, 3,* and *4*). If that defense succeeds, the descriptivist cannot plausibly maintain that what all three types of judgments have in common is their descriptive character.

Finally, in Section 1.3, I explore and narrow the possible solutions to the expanded version of the grammatological problem. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that taste judgments are nondescriptive,[6] while ordinary descriptive judgments remain plainly descriptive. It follows that any adequate solution to the grammatological problem must provide an account of judgment (and belief) that is neutral with respect to descriptivism and nondescriptivism; if taste judgments are nondescriptive, the grammatical properties of all judgments inhere for reasons compatible with both views about moral judgments. The key upshot of this conditional conclusion is that a long-standing challenge for nondescriptivism in metaethics becomes highly sensitive to ongoing debates in the philosophy of language concerning the semantics of taste judgments. If taste judgments are indeed nondescriptive, as that literature increasingly suggests, then one of the most common objections to metaethical nondescriptivism loses much of its force.

This conditional result may strike some as counterintuitive and strange. My aim, however, is to encourage moral descriptivists to reconsider the semantic assumptions often underlying their accounts of moral judgment by engaging with the possibility that taste judgments are nondescriptive. At the same time, I hope to show that the literature on taste semantics has important implications for debates in metaethics: understanding the nondescriptive character of taste judgments can illuminate long-standing challenges for moral theory. By drawing attention to the intersection of these domains, the expanded grammatological problem invites scholars from both fields to work together in exploring how descriptive *and* nondescriptive judgments (declarative sentences, predicates, propositions, and beliefs) can coexist within our cognitive and linguistic practices.

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[6] Although I hope to argue for nondescriptivism about taste judgments (i.e. taste expressivism) in a future paper, I lack the space to do so with complete satisfaction here. For some initial support, see Clapp (2015) and Gutzmann (2016). Horgan and Timmons (2000, 2006) are also instructive. Although Horgan and Timmons's work primarily concerns moral judgments, it is fairly straightforward how their 'minimalism' about moral judgments might be extended to taste judgments.

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1.1 Differentiating Grammatological from Compositional

The view in metaethics that moral judgments are nondescriptive (i.e. are not typically used to make factual statements[7]) is controversial. There are many reasons why this is so, but the one which I discuss in this chapter is:

> **The Grammatological Problem** (*for nondescriptivists*):
>
> There is tremendous overlap between the grammatical and logical (i.e. 'grammatological') properties of moral judgments and ordinary descriptive judgments.[8] Why?

What best explains this fact? Is it merely a tremendous coincidence? This problem was first posed by Peter Glassen (1959), albeit in slightly different terms. As per the title of his seminal paper, Glassen concerned himself with "The *Cognitivity* of Moral Judgments" (italics mine). As he used the term, "cognitivism" about some class of judgments is the view that:

> (1) they assert something, or they are assertive propositions or genuine propositions, or they make a statement, or they say something;
> (2) they are either true or false;
> (3) one can be either in the right or wrong about them;
> (4) they can be either proved or disproved;
> (5) they are capable of having objective validity. (1959, p.58)

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[7] Attempting to make a factual statement and successfully making one are distinct. A judgment (or sentence) may, of course, be false even if it is used in *an attempt* to make a factual statement. For example, 'the sky is green' is typically used to make a factual statement, yet it is false. For convenience, I will write that '*X* is typically used to make a factual statement' to mean that a judgment *X* is typically used in an *attempt* to make a factual statement. This formulation does not imply that *X* is true.

[8] I use 'judgment' as a neutral term for declarative sentences (i.e. sentences with subject-copula-predicate form, ending in a period or exclamation mark). I reserve 'belief' for when I discuss people's psychological acceptance of (or commitment to) propositions. See footnote 2 for more.

To be sure, this conception of cognitivism is broadly consistent with what I have been calling descriptivism.[9] So for the sake of clarity, I will present Glassen's (1959) argument in terms of descriptivism instead of cognitivism.

In Glassen's view, the debate as to whether nondescriptivism about moral judgments is true is a matter to be settled by what ordinary English speakers *intend* to use moral judgments for. Intentions, he points out, are not something we can simply introspect, so Glassen suggests that we should look to the linguistic evidence. He instructs us to "observe the characteristic features of moral discourse, and see how these compare with the characteristic features of discourse already known or, at any rate, believed to be [descriptive]." (1959, pp.61-62) Proceeding to do so, Glassen came up with the following list of (mostly) grammatical and logical properties characteristic of both moral and ordinary descriptive discourse:

> [1.] The fact that moral judgments are expressed in the indicative mood, which is the standard assertive form of discourse; [2.] that they can be re-worded as questions; [3.] that they can be objects of [propositional attitude] verbs; [4.] that cognitional appraisal terms [like 'true,' 'false,' 'correct,' and 'mistaken'] are applied to them; [5.] that they are impersonal and objectivity is expected of those who utter them; [6.] that their predicates often take the form of abstract nouns; and [7.] that disagreements concerning them occasion debates which sound just like debates concerning any other type of assertion[.] (1959, p.71)

[9] A judgment is "descriptive," in the sense relevant here, if and only if it is typically used (in attempts) to make a factual statement. Descriptive judgments are either true or false. People can be either right or wrong about them. They are often proven or disproven. They aspire to objective validity. So what Glassen calls a "cognitive judgment" is broadly consistent with what I call a "descriptive judgment."

Note that although Glassen (1959) distinguishes "descriptive" from "cognitive" propositions, Glassen uses 'descriptive' to mean something like "empirical," in order to differentiate empirical propositions from the broader set of truth-apt propositions. This is evident, for instance, when he writes: "[a]ll sentences expressing descriptive propositions are, no doubt, cognitive, but not all cognitive sentences express descriptive propositions." (p.58)

With the possible exception of the fifth item on Glassen's list,[10] both descriptivists and nondescriptivists acknowledge that moral discourse exhibits each of these properties characteristic of ordinary descriptive discourse.

Glassen then argues that, because none of these properties can be straightforwardly explained by the nondescriptivist theories of his day, this provides good reason to judge those theories implausible (1959, p.66). Of course, Glassen's argument extends well beyond the emotive and imperative theories he initially considered: it applies to any account that cannot readily explain *why* moral and ordinary descriptive judgments share all the grammatical and logical properties on Glassen's list. This is the enduring challenge of the grammatological problem (as Glassen conceived it).

The important question, then, is how nondescriptivists might attempt to solve the grammatological problem. One initially appealing strategy is to provide a nondescriptive explanation for each of the properties of moral language, such as those on Glassen's list. Or, better yet, nondescriptivists might offer some account of a nondescriptive attitude which moral judgments supposedly express, and then show how all the properties on Glassen's list follow naturally from the constitutive nature of that attitude. This methodological approach has inspired numerous nondescriptive accounts of the grammatical and logical properties of moral judgment.[11]

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[10] The claim that moral judgments are impersonal and objective is, absent additional evidence, exactly the sort of claim which descriptivists assert and nondescriptivists deny. Now, Glassen's examples do show that people can distinguish moral judgments (e.g. 'dancing is wrong') from judgments which explicitly describe a person or group's beliefs, desires, or other attitudes (e.g. 'you disapprove of dancing'). However, this is hardly sufficient to show that moral judgments are impersonal and objective. For as I shall say more about in *Chapter 3*, people can distinguish even paradigmatically non-objective judgments (e.g. 'popcorn is yummy') from judgments explicitly about a person's beliefs, desires, or other attitudes (e.g. 'you enjoy popcorn'). In either case, it is perfectly acceptable to say "the fact that you or anyone else [disapproves of dancing / enjoys popcorn] doesn't make it [wrong / yummy]." So by Glassen's standard, if moral judgments qualify as "impersonal and objective," then so too do taste judgments like 'popcorn is yummy.

[11] The first such account is (arguably) Hare's (1970). More recently, Blackburn (1984, 1988), Gibbard (1990, 2003), Horgan and Timmons (2000, 2006), Schroeder (2008), and others have tried their hands at the task of giving a satisfactory nondescriptive semantic account of moral judgment.

Setting aside the difficulties nondescriptivists have faced in actually formulating these accounts, there is a deeper problem with this approach: even if successful, it cannot solve the grammatological problem. If the nondescriptivist proceeds through each of the grammatical and logical properties of moral language and offers an independent explanation for each,[12] then all they really offer are *ad hoc* explanations – and as Glassen reminds us, "the necessity for ad hoc explanations is a weakness in a theory and a good reason for holding it suspect" (1959, p.66).

Theories which explain how Glassen's properties emerge downstream from the nondescriptive attitude supposedly expressed by moral judgments fare a bit better. After all, this mirrors how the descriptivists' account works. The difference is that, instead of appealing to a *descriptive* attitude (viz. ordinary descriptive belief) supposedly expressed by moral judgments in order to explain how Glassen's properties arise, the nondescriptivist appeals to a *nondescriptive* attitude. This strategy has the advantage of providing a unified, coherent explanation for why moral judgments exhibit each of the properties on Glassen's list. But that advantage, I'm afraid, is still not sufficient to solve the grammatological problem.

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[12] For an example of what independent nondescriptivist accounts might look like, consider the following toy theory, inspired by Blackburn (1984, p.194) and Schroeder (2010, p.116). Let '**B!**()' be an operator taking actions as arguments in order to express disapproval of them. Thus, **B!**(lying) expresses disapproval of lying. On the toy view in question, the English sentence 'lying is wrong' expresses exactly what **B!**(lying) does – disapproval of lying.

Conditionals such as 'if lying is wrong, then getting your little brother to lie is wrong' could then receive the following toy treatment: **B!**(**B!**(lying) & ~**B!**(getting your little brother to lie)). On this account, the conditional also expresses disapproval – specifically, of the state of disapproving of lying while not disapproving of getting your little brother to lie.

One upshot of this account is that it can explain why failing to accept the conclusion of a valid *modus ponens* argument with moral premises is irrational (in at least some sense of "irrational"). Suppose someone accepts that lying is wrong (**B!**(lying)), and that if lying is wrong then getting your little brother to lie is wrong (**B!**(**B!**(lying) **& ~B!**(getting your little brother to lie))), but fails to accept that getting your little brother to lie is wrong (**~B!**(getting your little brother to lie)). In doing so, they occupy the very state (**B!**(lying) **& ~B!**(getting your little brother to lie)) that they themselves disapprove of by accepting the conditional. Insofar as it is irrational to be in a state one disapproves of, it is irrational to accept both the antecedent and the conditional but not to accept the consequent.

Semantic issues with this account aside, notice that the toy treatment of conditionals here is *not necessitated* by the previous treatment of atomic moral judgments. Other nondescriptivist accounts of conditionals are possible. Moreover, neither account just given suffices to explain the many other features of moral judgments – their capacity for negation, disjunction, interrogative form, and so on. For present purposes, the point is simply that this nondescriptivist strategy lacks unity.

A satisfactory solution must explain why moral and ordinary descriptive judgments share so many grammatical and logical properties. To offer a fundamentally different (i.e. uniquely nondescriptive) account for the same set of properties does nothing to explain why these properties are possessed by ordinary descriptive judgments. At best, the nondescriptivist can claim it is a remarkable coincidence that moral and ordinary descriptive judgments share so many grammatical and logical properties. But this is tantamount to there being no reason for the overlap – and that is just too implausible to believe.

An example may help clarify the point. Suppose two students, A and B, are enrolled in the same class, and the professor assigns them an essay. A and B proceed to submit nearly identical papers. What is the professor to conclude? The theory that plagiarism is afoot is akin to the descriptivists' answer to the grammatological problem: it appeals to a single explanation – common authorship – to account for why the essays are practically identical. By contrast, the theory that each student independently wrote virtually the same paper resembles the nondescriptivist's approach, since it offers fundamentally different accounts – independent authorship by A and B – for the overlapping material. But by providing unrelated explanations, the most the professor could say is that it is a remarkable coincidence that A and B just so happened to write nearly identical papers. This is tantamount to there being no reason for the tremendous overlap, and that is just too implausible to believe.

What this illustrates is that the grammatological problem – the challenge of explaining why moral and ordinary descriptive judgments share so many grammatical and logical properties – is different from (albeit related to) the challenge nondescriptivists face in providing a compositionally adequate account of the grammatical and logical features of moral judgments. The latter is sometimes called "the Frege-Geach problem," and other times "the embedding problem," but I will refer to it as:

> **The Compositional Problem**:
>
> Nondescriptivists have struggled to provide semantic theories of moral sentences which satisfy the *principle of compositionality*; nondescriptivists have not been able to give successful accounts of the meanings of logically complex moral sentences in terms of their (supposedly) nondescriptive parts and their arrangement.

Until recently, descriptivists and nondescriptivists alike did not sharply distinguish between the grammatological problem and the compositional problem, since many assumed that a satisfactory solution to the latter would automatically resolve the former. Richard Joyce (2001), for example, cites Glassen's argument as among the strongest against nondescriptivism.[13] At the culmination of his retelling of that argument, Joyce writes:

> In the absence of an explanation of *why* we would have [a nondescriptive] discourse bearing all the hallmarks of [a descriptive] one – in the absence of an explanation of why, if we already have perfectly good linguistic devices for expressing commands (imperatives) we should choose to cloak them systematically in indicative form – we must assume that if something walks and talks like a bunch of [descriptive judgments], it's highly likely that it *is* a bunch of [descriptive judgments]. (2001, p.14)

Setting aside Joyce's focus on the imperative theory (which is only one type of nondescriptivism), the crucial point is what he takes an acceptable solution to the grammatological problem to look like: an explanation of why a nondescriptive discourse would "bear all the hallmarks" (i.e. exhibit so many of the grammatical and logical properties) of a descriptive discourse. Such an explanation might suffice to solve the compositional problem, but it does not resolve the grammatological problem. Solutions to the latter require something more: a reason to think that the grammatical and logical overlap between moral and ordinary descriptive judgments is not merely coincidental. More precisely, the grammatological problem demands an account of what moral and ordinary descriptive judgments have in common, in virtue of which they share so many grammatical and logical properties. By contrast, the compositional problem only requires a nondescriptive semantic account for each of the grammatical and logical properties of moral judgments – a challenge which does not demand any explanation for why these properties are shared with ordinary descriptive judgments.

To my knowledge, Mark Schroeder (2010) comes closest to distinguishing the demands of the grammatological problem from those of the compositional problem.[14] He writes:

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[13] Joyce, like Glassen, prefers to use more traditional terminology like 'cognitivism' instead of 'descriptivism.' For example, he speaks of "assertions" instead of "descriptive judgments," and of English speakers typically using moral sentences "in an assertoric manner" instead of "in attempts to describe facts." For the sake of clarity, I will represent Joyce's views using the latter terminology.

[14] Schroeder also frames the debate in terms of 'cognitivism' instead of 'descriptivism.' Having said that, Schroeder is quite flexible in his choice of terminology. He treats cognitivism, for instance, as the view that moral beliefs are descriptive beliefs. Once again, for the sake of clarity, I will represent Schroeder's views wholly in terms of descriptivism.

> [T]he [nondescriptivist] view has much *more* to explain than the [descriptivist] view. It needs to not just give us an account of the nature of moral belief, it must also explain the large coincidence between the properties of moral belief and ordinary descriptive belief. According to [nondescriptivism], this really is a coincidence, because even though we use the word 'belief' for both of these attitudes, they are really, at bottom, different kinds of attitudes. Whereas according to [descriptivism], there is no coincidence, because there is really only one kind of attitude. (2010, p.96)

Although Schroeder (2010) does not quite say it, it is evident from his discussion that even if nondescriptivists can explain why moral beliefs have the properties that they do (i.e. solve the compositional problem), they still face the problem that – on any view according to which moral belief constitutes a distinct attitude from ordinary descriptive belief – it would be a "large coincidence" that the two types of belief share so many properties. More to the point, Schroeder recognizes that it is to the explanatory advantage of descriptivism that the overlap between the properties of moral and ordinary descriptive belief is "no coincidence."

I shall take it as fairly well-established, from this point on, that the grammatological problem is not only different from the compositional problem, but in at least one way, more demanding. With this matter settled, there is only one more task which I hope to accomplish in this section, and that is to make note of some of the ways in which Glassen's original list of properties has been augmented since 1959. This will prove important in Section 1.2, where I will argue that taste judgments have *all* of the grammatical and logical properties on Glassen's (augmented) list.

1.1.2 Glassen's (Augmented) List

In recent years, Glassen's argument has been repeated by a number of descriptivists. Each adds something to Glassen's list, with the intended effect of making nondescriptivism ever less plausible. I enumerate some of these additions here.

Joyce, I have said, recites Glassen's argument. To Glassen's original list of seven features which moral and ordinary descriptive judgments share, Joyce adds two features which he attributes to Peter Geach (1965). Joyce (2001) writes:

> We can add to [Glassen's] list the two related characteristics highlighted by Peter Geach.
>
> 8. They appear in logically complex contexts (e.g., as the antecedents of conditionals)
> 9. They appear as premises in arguments considered valid (p.13)

These features are also included in Michael Huemer's (2005) retelling of Glassen's argument. To these, Huemer adds one additional feature which appears to be his own original contribution:

> [10.] One can issue imperatives and emotional expressions directed at things that are characterized morally. If [nondescriptivism] is true, what do these mean: 'Do the right thing.' 'Hurray for virtue!' Even more puzzlingly for the [nondescriptivist], you can imagine appropriate contexts for such remarks as, 'We shouldn't be doing this, but I don't care; let's do it anyway'. This is perfectly intelligible, but it would be unintelligible if 'We shouldn't be doing this' either expressed an aversive emotion towards the proposed action or issued an imperative not to do it. (2005, p.21)

Last but not least are Schroeder's (2008) manifold additions. He begins by recounting four properties which should now be familiar (and which I have numbered appropriately). Schroeder writes,

> [M]oral language *does* seem to work very much like ordinary descriptive language. … One of the simplest examples of this is that [4.] we seem to be able to say of moral sentences that they are true, or that they are false. … Another simple example is that [2.] moral terms can be used to ask questions: I can ask, 'is murder wrong?' and if you say, 'murder is wrong', then you have answered my question. [7.] We also disagree with each other, if you say, 'murder is wrong' but I say, 'murder is not wrong'. And [9.] when we formulate moral arguments, we evaluate these for validity in exactly the same way as we evaluate descriptive arguments for validity. (2008, pp.4-5)

To this list of familiar features, Schroeder mentions at least eight additional properties (which, again, I have numbered appropriately):

> In fact, and this cannot be emphasized enough, *every* natural-language construction that admits of descriptive predicates admits of moral predicates, and seems to function in precisely the same way: [11.] tense; [8.] conditionals; [12.] every kind of modal—alethic, epistemic, or deontic; [13.] qualifiers like 'yesterday'; [14.] generics and [15.] habituals; [16.] complement-taking verbs like 'proved that' and 'wonders whether'; [17.] infinitive-taking verbs of every class, including 'expects to', 'wants to', and 'compels to'; [18.] binary quantifiers like 'many' and 'most'; and more. It is crucially important to understand that the [compositional] problem for noncognitivism is not simply a problem about the validity of *modus ponens*, or even simply about logic. *Every* construction in natural languages seems to work equally well no matter whether normative or descriptive language is involved, and to yield complex sentences with the same semantic properties. (2008, p.4-5)

These additions to Glassen's original list increase the challenge of the grammatological problem; they make it more difficult to identify what moral and ordinary descriptive judgments have in common, in virtue of which they exhibit all eighteen of these grammatical and logical properties. In Section 1.2, I first show that taste judgments have all of these features and then

argue that this fact leads to an expanded grammatological problem – one that confronts nondescriptivists *and* descriptivists.

1.2 The Expanded Grammatological Problem

An expanded version of the grammatological problem looms. For as it turns out, there is another class of judgments with all the grammatical and logical properties discussed in Section 1.1: taste judgments (e.g. 'sushi is delicious'). In this section, I demonstrate this claim, and then show how it gives rise to an expanded grammatological problem, this time for nondescriptivists *and* descriptivists:

> **The Grammatological Problem** (*for descriptivists* and *nondescriptivists*):
> There is tremendous overlap between the grammatical and logical (i.e. 'grammatological') properties of taste judgments, moral judgments, and ordinary descriptive judgments. Why?

Now, before proceeding to show that taste judgments have all the grammatical and logical properties on Glassen's (augmented) list, it is worth addressing an obvious question: what are "taste judgments"? Taste judgments, like moral judgments, are a species of judgment – that is, they are sentences in subject-copula-predicate form, ending in a period or exclamation mark.[15] As with all judgments, taste judgments attribute (i.e. predicate) apparent properties to their subjects.

Taste judgments are distinguished from other types of judgments by their unique predicates: personal predicates of taste (PPTs). There is a growing literature on the distinctive properties of taste predicates, judgments, and discourse.[16] Because the goal of this literature is to

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[15] I use 'judgment' as a neutral term for declarative sentences (i.e. sentences with subject-copula-predicate form, ending in a period). For my purposes, taste judgments essentially refer to declarative sentences with taste predicates. See footnote 2 for more about my use of 'judgment.'

Taste judgments are closely related to – but not to be confused with – Immanuel Kant's judgments of taste. Kant's judgments are psychological entities, akin to beliefs, rather than explicitly linguistic entities, like declarative sentences. Kant's judgments of taste are subjective attributions of aesthetic qualities which aspire to universal validity. By contrast – in the contemporary sense that concerns my work here – taste judgments are simply declarative sentences with taste predicates. Taste judgments' semantics and the nature of their subjectivity are still hotly debated.

[16] This literature began in earnest with the relativist works of Kölbel (2002, 2004) and Lasersohn (2005, 2017). Since then, taste predicates, judgments, and discourse have been discussed by an ever increasing

provide a comprehensive semantic account of what taste predicates and judgments are, some illustrative examples will suffice for now: 'delicious,' 'disgusting,' 'fun,' 'interesting,' and 'fantastic' are common examples of taste predicates. Common examples of taste judgments include sentences like 'sushi is delicious,' 'durian is disgusting,' 'rollercoasters are fun,' 'Italian cars are fantastic,' etc. For present purposes, taste judgments are paradigmatically the sorts of judgments about which people are wont to say 'there is no fact about the matter because that is *just a matter of taste*.'

This rough-and-ready characterization of taste judgments is sufficient for my current purposes. In what follows, I demonstrate exhaustively that taste judgments and discourse exhibit all of the grammatical and logical properties that the descriptivists from Section 1.1 highlighted as characteristic of ordinary descriptive judgments and discourse.

Consider an atomic taste judgment like 'sushi is delicious.'[17] This taste judgment is a declarative sentence; it is in the indicative mood.[18] Alongside 'yes' and 'no,' this atomic taste judgment is an acceptable answer to the well-formed question 'is sushi delicious?'.[19] Propositional attitude verbs can be prefixed to 'sushi is delicious,' as in 'Tom believes that sushi is delicious,' 'I hope that the sushi is delicious,' and 'Jim wonders whether your sushi is delicious.'[20] People can and often do disagree about whether sushi is delicious.[21] Parties to such

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number of scholars from various backgrounds and subdisciplines, cf. MacFarlane (2007, 2014), Dreier (2009), Clapp (2015), Gutzmann (2016), Eriksson (2016, 2019), Foushee and Srinivasan (2017), Solt (2018), Berškytė (2020), and many others.

One fascinating and much discussed feature of taste discourse is that it is alleged to have two (otherwise) incompatible properties: the property of *disagreement* and the property of *faultlessness*. The first is, roughly, the property that taste discourse has in virtue of the fact that two people seem to be genuinely contradicting (i.e. *disagreeing with*) each other when one party rejects a taste judgment which the other accepts (e.g. 'rollercoasters are fun'). The second is, roughly, the property that taste discourse has in virtue of the fact that in such disagreements, it does not seem necessary that anyone is mistaken (i.e. *at fault*).

[17] If you do not recognize 'sushi is delicious' as a taste judgment – in other words, if you are so inclined to believe there is an objective fact as to whether sushi is delicious – then find some other judgment which you do recognize as *just a matter of taste*. My argument works just the same for 'anchovies are disgusting,' 'science-fiction is amazing' 'dancing is fun,' 'popcorn is yummy,' and so on.

[18] This corresponds to feature (1.) from Glassen's (augmented) list.
[19] This corresponds to feature (2.) from Glassen's (augmented) list.
[20] This corresponds to feature (3.) from Glassen's (augmented) list.
[21] This corresponds to feature (7.) from Glassen's (augmented) list.

disagreements might say such things as ‘it’s true that sushi is delicious,’ and ‘no, sushi is not delicious.’[22] People can and often do distinguish ‘sushi is delicious’ from judgments explicitly about people’s tastes, as in ‘the fact that you or anyone else enjoys sushi doesn’t make it delicious.’[23] Taste predicates like ‘delicious’ can be transformed into abstract nouns like ‘deliciousness,’ as in ‘I am not questioning the sushi’s saltiness, but its deliciousness.’[24] Things characterized as ‘delicious’ can be the objects of imperatives and emotional expressions, such as ‘eat this delicious sushi,’ and ‘hurray for delicious sushi!’[25]

Taste judgments like ‘sushi is delicious’ also have the very same logical properties which first motivated the compositional problem. For instance, ‘sushi is delicious’ can appear in logically complex contexts like ‘if sushi is delicious, then sashimi is phenomenal,’ and ‘if this sushi is delicious, then it won’t bother my stomach.’[26] Despite the fact that the phrase ‘sushi is delicious’ appears in both of these conditional sentences and has its usual meaning, neither sentence expresses a fondness for sushi.[27] ‘Sushi is delicious’ must have its usual meaning in these conditional contexts because these conditionals can logically interact with their antecedents – restated as independent premises – in arguments which appear intuitively valid,[28] such as:

***T*(1)**. If sushi is delicious, then sashimi is phenomenal.
***T*(2)**. Sushi is delicious.
***T*(C)**. Therefore, sashimi is phenomenal.

I turn now to Schroeder’s manifold additions to Glassen’s list of the grammatical and logical properties supposedly characteristic of descriptive discourse. To echo Schroeder, every natural-language construction which admits of descriptive and moral predicates also admits of taste predicates like ‘delicious’ (2008, p.5). Taste predicates can be used in various tenses and with various qualifiers, as in ‘the sushi was delicious yesterday’ and ‘the sushi will be delicious tomorrow.’[29] Taste predicates can appear in generics, as in ‘delicious sushi is expensive.’[30] They

[22] This corresponds to feature (4.) from Glassen’s (augmented) list.
[23] This corresponds to feature (5.) from Glassen’s (augmented) list. See footnote 10 for more details.
[24] This corresponds to feature (6.) from Glassen’s (augmented) list.
[25] This corresponds to feature (10.) from Glassen’s (augmented) list.
[26] This corresponds to feature (8.) from Glassen’s (augmented) list.
[27] This corresponds to an alternative version of feature (8.) from Glassen’s (augmented) list.
[28] This corresponds to feature (9.) from Glassen’s (augmented) list.
[29] This corresponds to features (11.) and (13.) from Glassen’s (augmented) list.
[30] This corresponds to feature (14.) from Glassen’s (augmented) list.

can appear in habituals too, as in 'after long days at work, John treats himself to delicious sushi.'[31] Complement-taking verbs like 'proved that' accept taste predicates, as in 'the restaurant offers free samples to prove that their sushi is delicious.'[32] Infinitive-taking verbs such as 'expects to', 'wants to', and 'compels to' all work well with taste predicates, as in 'Johns wants to, is compelled to, and expects to eat delicious sushi tonight.'[33] Taste predicates work with binary quantifiers like 'most' and 'many,' as in 'most sushi is delicious' and 'many types of sushi are delicious.'[34] Alethic modals work with 'delicious,' as in 'if all sushi is delicious, then this sushi *should* be delicious.' Epistemic modals work too, as in 'I just put the sushi into the refrigerator, so it is *probably* still delicious.' Last but not least, deontic modals also accept taste predicates like 'delicious,' as in 'for what the restaurant charges, their sushi *should* be delicious.'[35]

This exhausts every purely grammatical and logical feature from the augmented version of Glassen's list that I detailed in Section 1.1. The only feature I have taken some liberties with is feature (5.) from Glassen's list, which reads as:

> [5.] they are impersonal and objectivity is expected of those who utter them[.] (1959, p.71)

At face value this claim, far from highlighting an uncontroversial grammatical or logical property, merely asserts in different terms what Glassen (1959) purports it to be evidence for: the claim that moral judgments are ordinary descriptive judgments with objective truth-conditions. It is thus exactly the sort of claim which (absent additional evidence) descriptivists assert and nondescriptivists deny. In other words, feature (5.) from Glassen's list is, at least on its face, question begging.

Having said that, Glassen's (1959) discussion of the conversational property that underwrites his claim about feature (5.) is much less problematic. He writes:

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[31] This corresponds to feature (15.) from Glassen's (augmented) list.
[32] This corresponds to feature (16.) from Glassen's (augmented) list.
[33] This corresponds to feature (17.) from Glassen's (augmented) list.
[34] This corresponds to feature (18.) from Glassen's (augmented) list.
[35] Together with the previous two examples, this corresponds to feature (12.) from Glassen's (augmented) list.

> One additional feature of moral judgments is that moral judgments have an impersonal character and objectivity is expected of those who make them. If we believe that someone who utters a moral judgment is influenced by his personal desires, or by his emotions, or by his prejudices, we tend to discount it, just as we do in the case of other sentences intended to be cognitive. … A: "You say that dancing is wrong. But why? Simply because you have been led to disapprove of it by your puritanical parents. The fact, however, that you or anyone else disapproves of it doesn't make it wrong." To this B may reply: "I am not contending that it does; and while it is true that I first learned to disapprove of dancing from my parents, I have since then arrived at the conclusion that it is wrong quite independently of their influence." … Examples such as these—and many more could be given—show that if we are to take someone's moral judgment seriously, then, *even if moral judgments express feelings or attitudes, we must believe that they are not simply the attitudes of the speaker, but represent some general, impersonal standpoint*. (italics mine) (p.66)

It is not difficult to modify Glassen's example so that it suffices to show that taste judgments have the same property. For instance: A: "You say that anchovies are disgusting. But why? Simply because you have been led to dislike them by your squeamish parents. The fact, however, that you or anyone else dislikes them doesn't make them disgusting." To this B may reply: "I am not contending that it does; and while it is true that I first learned to dislike anchovies from my parents, I have since arrived at the conclusion that anchovies are disgusting quite independently of their influence." My point, to be sure, is not that taste judgments do not express feelings or attitudes. My point (echoing Glassen (1959)) is that even if they do, "we must believe that they are not simply the attitudes of the speaker, but represent some general, impersonal standpoint[,]" since speakers have no trouble distinguishing taste judgments from statements about a particular person's (or group's) tastes. So to the same degree that Glassen's own example suffices to show that moral judgments have feature (5.), the modified example above suffices to show that taste judgments have feature (5.).

I have now shown that taste judgments have every grammatical and logical property mentioned in Glassen's (augmented) list, as detailed in Section 1.1. So the following problem looms to the *exact* extent which the original grammatological problem (for nondescriptivists) does:

> **The Grammatological Problem** (*for descriptivists* and *nondescriptivists*):
>
> There is tremendous overlap between the grammatical and logical (i.e. 'grammatological') properties of taste judgments, moral judgments, and ordinary descriptive judgments. Why?

What best explains this fact? What is it that all three types of judgment have in common, in virtue of which they share the grammatical and logical properties that they do? Recall from Section 1.1 that the descriptivists' characteristic answer is that these grammatical and logical properties are the hallmarks of description. So, the moral descriptivists are committed to saying that if taste judgments also have these properties, then taste judgments are descriptive too.

The problem for descriptivists is that it is far from clear that taste judgments are descriptive. If taste judgments were descriptive, then by definition they would be typically used to describe (i.e. be used in attempts to make) factual statements. Yet taste judgments are precisely the sort of judgments about which almost everyone (philosophers included) is wont to say "there is no fact about the matter; that's *just* a matter of taste."[36] The descriptivist is thus committed to the implausible thesis that expressions like these are literally false, and that taste judgments really do describe (i.e. are typically used in attempts to make) factual statements. In Section 1.3, I examine some of the problems with this view, and reach a few preliminary conclusions about the possible solutions to my expanded version of the grammatological problem.

1.3 Narrowing the Possible Solutions

Despite the fact that taste judgments (e.g. 'sushi is delicious') have all the features on Glassen's augmented, they are very probably not descriptive. For reasons I survey here (and

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[36] To be sure, people often speak loosely, omitting one or more words for the sake of brevity. Someone speaking loosely might intend to express one of several different things by "there is no fact about the matter." For judgments with vague predicates (e.g. 'turquoise is blue') or for judgments with gradable adjectives (e.g. 'the man is tall') someone might say: "there is no (substantive) fact about the matter; that's *just* a matter of definitions." Alternatively, for judgments whose truth is unknown and extremely hard to ascertain (e.g. 'there are an even number of stars in the universe'), someone might say: "there is no (established or ascertainable) fact about the matter; that's *just* anyone's guess."

The key question is: what do most people intend the contrast between "matters of fact" and "matters of taste" to distinguish? One explanation is that they intend to distinguish statements about the external world ("matters of fact") from statements merely about people and their mental states ("matters of taste"). This is implausible, however, since there plainly are facts about people's mental states. A more plausible explanation is that most people intend the contrast between "matters of fact" and "matters of taste" to distinguish statements with robust, objective truth-conditions from sentences which merely express an opinion. Since it is not clear that there can be objective truth-conditions for sentences which *merely* express an opinion, this provides some initial motivation to think that most people contrast "matters of taste" with "matters of fact" to distinguish mere expressions of opinion from statements with robust, objective truth-conditions.

discuss in depth in *Chapters 2* and *3*), it is highly unlikely that taste judgments are typically used to make factual statements. Note that my conclusion in this section will only be conditional: *if* taste judgments are not descriptive (as the magnitude of the problems with taste descriptivism suggests), *then* moral, ordinary descriptive, and taste judgments cannot share their grammatical and logical properties in virtue of all being descriptive. This conditional is true regardless of whether its antecedent is. For this conditional to have any bite, of course, its antecedent should seem likely – hence my aim in this Section is to provide some initial motivation for skepticism about taste descriptivism.

To begin with, consider the following widespread and fairly uncontroversial intuition: taste judgments (e.g. 'popcorn is yummy') are subjective. Equivalently, they are not objective – they do not describe an objective state of affairs. For those who share this intuition, taste judgments are *merely* vehicles for expressing one's tastes, preferences, or other mental states; they stake no claim to objectivity, and there is no way for the world to be for any given taste judgment to be authoritatively true or false. Ordinary people seem to express this view when they say, of at least some taste judgments, "there isn't a fact about that," and when pressed for clarification, "that's *just* a matter of taste." There may well be other explanations for these (and related) expressions, but for now I take them as *prima facie* evidence that taste judgments are nondescriptive.[37]

Given how common such deflationary remarks are[38] – and the fact that taste judgments nonetheless share all the grammatical and logical properties listed in Section 1.1 – let us take stock of descriptivists' options in responding to the expanded grammatological problem. According to a fairly common taxonomy of metaethical views, descriptivists have three options (short of abandoning descriptivism): (1) They can become taste realists and insist, contrary to popular belief, that there really are mind-independent facts about whether sushi is delicious, durian is disgusting, rollercoasters are fun, and so on. (2) They can become error theorists about taste judgments by maintaining – once again contrary to popular belief – that although there

[37] See footnote 36.

[38] Such statements include 'that's just your opinion,' 'there's no fact about that,' 'that's just a matter of taste,' 'that's completely subjective,' 'it's all relative,' 'that's just personal preference,' 'different strokes for different folks,' 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder,' and more.

aren't any mind-independent taste facts, taste judgments are nevertheless about them (or are typically used to describe them), such that taste discourse is fundamentally erroneous. (3) They can become taste subjectivists (i.e. contextualists) and argue that taste judgments like 'sushi is delicious' describe mind-*dependent* facts, like the subjective tastes of people (e.g. Emily's love of sushi).

The first two of these positions are extraordinarily unappealing, given that (1) almost nobody believes there are mind-independent taste facts, and (2) almost nobody thinks that taste discourse is fundamentally erroneous. This leaves taste subjectivism as the descriptivist's most plausible option.

Although the claim that taste judgments are "subjective" is intuitively appealing – since ordinary speakers often say as much – philosophers and ordinary people can mean very different things by 'subjective.' Taste subjectivism is a highly specific semantic thesis, and, somewhat ironically, it implies that taste judgments have *objective* truth-values. On this view (known in the taste literature as contextualism, or indexical relativism), the context of a particular utterance of a taste judgment objectively determines a person or group whose tastes the utterance (supposedly) describes. Since there are objective facts about any given person or group's taste preferences, it follows that each utterance of a taste judgment is either objectively true or false.

Taste subjectivism – hereafter, "contextualism" – has several other questionable features. For one, it entails that all taste judgments are, at bottom, about people. This is odd, since at face value 'sushi is delicious' appears to be about sushi, while 'roses are lovely' appears to be about roses – not about people's tastes, even if such information can be inferred from context. More seriously, taste contextualism implies that in underspecified contexts of use – that is, when the context of a speaker's utterance is not well understood to another party – the meanings of taste judgments are indeterminate to that party. On this view, it should be infelicitous to object to a taste judgment when the context of utterance is plainly unknown, since one would (supposedly) be objecting to a sentence without knowing what it is about. Yet, intuitively, such objections often seem perfectly felicitous:

(1) ???: Sushi is delicious.
John: No, sushi is disgusting.

In this example, John responds felicitously to a taste judgment without knowing the context of its use (i.e. the speaker, time, and place of utterance); John responds felicitously to this taste judgment without being able to tell which person or group it is (supposedly) about. Moreover, it would be strikingly *infelicitous* for John to ask for more context in the way contextualism about taste judgments predicts he should:

(2) ???: Sushi is delicious.
John: #What's the context? What person or group is this about? If it's about Susan, it's true. If it's about Jeremy, it's false. I need more context to understand what we're talking about here.

The felicity of John's objection in (1), together with the infelicity of his request for more context in (2), strongly suggests that taste judgments are not descriptions of the tastes of a person or group determined by the context of use. If they were, their meanings would be indeterminate without that context; John's objection in (1) would then seem infelicitously presumptuous, and his request in (2) perfectly appropriate. Yet neither is the case.

The problems for taste contextualism become even clearer when we contrast taste judgments with other kinds of context-sensitive judgments – such as legality judgments – that lack explicit indexicals. Legality judgments are about the laws of a state or system determined by the context of use. Unlike taste judgments, their meanings are genuinely indeterminate without that context, and it is infelicitous to object to them when the relevant context is unknown:

(3) ???: Driving in the right lane is illegal.
John: #No, driving in the right lane is legal.

Without knowing the context that determines which state or system this legality judgment concerns, it is infelicitous for John to object, since he does not know what the judgment is about. In such cases, however, it is perfectly felicitous for John to ask for more context:

(4) ???: Driving in the right lane is illegal.
John: What's the context? What state or country is this about? If it's about the United Kingdom, it's true. If it's about the United States, it's false. I need more context to understand what we're talking about here.

Now, compare (1) with (3), and (2) with (4). The contrast in these cases strongly suggests that the meanings of taste judgments are not determined by their context of use. If contextualism

about taste judgments were true, (1) would pattern with (3), and (2) would pattern with (4). Since they do not, taste contextualism appears highly implausible.

There are additional, well-known problems with contextualism about taste judgments. By far the most well known is the argument from faultless disagreement. As Kölbel (2002, 2004) and Lasersohn (2005, 2017) emphasize, contextualism cannot account for genuine disagreements of taste that are essentially faultless – disagreements in which there need not be any external, objective fact about which party is "right" and which "wrong." For example:

(5) Mary: Rollercoasters are fun.
Jamie: I disagree, rollercoasters are not fun.

According to taste contextualism, Mary and Jamie are either disagreeing about the tastes of the same person or group, or they are describing the tastes of different people or groups. If the former, then either Mary is mistaken, or Jamie is, so their disagreement is not faultless. If it is the latter, Mary and Jamie are merely "talking past each other," and are not genuinely disagreeing. Either way, contextualism yields the wrong result, since intuitively, (5) constitutes a faultless, genuine disagreement.

This point is complicated by the objections of Sundell (2011), Huvenes (2012), Plunkett and Sundell (2013), and others. These philosophers highlight that clashing attitudes – here, clashing tastes – can generate intuitions of disagreement. To borrow Huvenes' (2012) example:

(6) Sally: I like this chili.
Mark: I disagree, it's too hot for me.

According to Sundell (2011), Huvenes (2012), Plunkett and Sundell (2013), and others, people can intuitively disagree with one another – as in (6) – simply by virtue of having clashing attitudes. Since clashing attitudes are typically faultless, these contextualists hope to account for some faultless taste disagreements by interpreting them as faultless descriptions of different people's tastes, and then explaining the intuition of disagreement by appealing to a clash of attitudes. By this method, taste contextualists can accommodate the intuition that (5) is a faultless disagreement by interpreting it roughly akin to (7):

(7) Mary: I like rollercoasters.

Jamie: I disagree, I don't like rollercoasters.

Eriksson (2019) has argued that clashes of attitude generally fail to explain intuitive occurrences of disagreement. One reason, noted by Sundell (2011) and Huvenes (2012), is that this strategy only works for certain disagreement markers, like 'I disagree.' If 'no,' or 'nuh uh' is used instead of 'I disagree,' objections to taste assertions remain felicitous:

(8) Mary: Rollercoasters are fun.
Jamie: Nuh uh, rollercoasters are not fun.

Intuitively, Jamie's reply in (8) is no different in substance from his reply in (5). The problem for contextualism, as Sundell (2011) recognizes, is that interpreting Mary and Jamie's statements in (8) as descriptions of different people's tastes no longer yields a felicitous exchange:

(9) Mary: I like rollercoasters.
Jamie: #Nuh uh, I don't like rollercoasters.

The infelicity of Jamie's response in (9) strongly suggests that 'nuh uh' marks a form of disagreement which is not satisfied by Mary and Jamie's clash of attitudes. In other words, the infelicity of Jamie's response in (9) demonstrates that (8) cannot be interpreted as a mere clash of attitudes. So much the worse for contextualism about taste judgments.

Now, as Sundell (2011) points out, the tools available to taste contextualists have not yet been exhausted. For although (8) cannot be explained as a mere clash of attitudes, it might yet be explained by some other kind of disagreement compatible both with (i) the felicity of Jamie's denial in (8), and with (ii) the semantics of contextualism. Sundell (2011) offers four alternative forms of disagreement that meet these criteria.[39] While it is certainly possible that (8) can be glossed as a "disagreement" in at least one of these alternative forms (a matter that I investigate in *Chapter 3*), this is largely inconsequential. For as Sundell (2011) readily admits, taste contextualism cannot accommodate disagreements involving the expression of inconsistent propositional contents – the most ordinary kind of disagreement. As Sundell (2011) writes,

> If an anti-contextualist wishes to make some specific set of disagreement data problematic [for contextualism], she is obliged to argue that the disagreement at hand requires the

[39] The alternative forms of disagreement which Sundell (2011) describes include (i) implicature disagreement, (ii) manner disagreement, (iii) character disagreement, and (iv) context disagreement. (pp.275-275)

> expression of inconsistent propositions; that is to say, she is obliged to show that the disagreement at hand falls into the category of Content Disagreement[.] (p.281)

The problem for contextualism about taste judgments is that such examples are easy to find; Sundell overstates the difficulty of the task. Consider the following faultless taste disagreements:

(10) Mary: Rollercoasters are fun.
Jamie: No, they're not; they're boring.

(11) Andy: Math is more interesting than history.
Blaire: No, it's not; history is more interesting than math.

In (10), Jamie contradicts Mary by calling rollercoasters boring, since 'rollercoasters are fun' and 'rollercoasters are boring' express inconsistent propositions. Likewise, in (11), Blaire contradicts Andy by calling history more interesting than math, since 'math is more interesting than history' and 'history is more interesting than math' also express inconsistent propositions.

As I shall examine in more detail in *Chapter 3*, faultless disagreements like (10) and (11) cannot be explained by any of the tools available to taste contextualists; they cannot be glossed as a "disagreement" in any of Sundell's (2011) alternative forms. They are not implicature disagreements, nor manner disagreements (since neither is about which of two synonymous adjectives is more proper), nor character disagreements (since nobody in either (10) or (11) disputes what the character of a word is or should be). They also cannot be context disagreements – metalinguistic disputes about which standard for applying a predicate is salient in the context (for example, whether an agreed upon height counts as "tall" in some circumstance). In (10), there is no reason to assume that Mary and Jamie agree in the first place about *how* fun rollercoasters are, only to dispute which contextual standard(s) for 'fun' and 'boring' apply. In (11), the case is even clearer: as Solt (2018) explains, the standards for comparative adjectives like 'more interesting' vary little with context.[40] This just leaves only one plausible interpretation: (10) and (11) are genuine content disagreements.

[40] To borrow Sundell's (2011) example, whether or not Ivan counts as tall can vary with the context. He might be tall relative to the average man, but not tall relative to the average basketball player. By contrast, whether or not Ivan is taller than Susan cannot vary with the context. If Ivan is taller than Susan, then he is taller than her in every context. The same goes for every other comparative adjective, such as 'more interesting.'

In review, Kölbel (2002, 2004) and Lasersohn (2005, 2017) argued – successfully, I think – that contextualism cannot accommodate faultless, "genuine" disagreements of taste. Sundell (2011), Huvenes (2012), and others have objected that not all "genuine" disagreements are ordinary propositional disagreements. To their credit, Kölbel and Lasersohn do largely treat the two as interchangeable. Still, it is not hard to see why: ordinary propositional disagreements are the most basic and familiar kind of "genuine" disagreement. Kölbel and Lasersohn's choice of words aside, the argument from faultless disagreement does not require that *all* "genuine" disagreements be ordinary propositional disagreements; it requires only that there exist *some* faultless propositional disagreements about matters of taste. Since (10) and (11) are precisely such cases – and many more such examples could be given – Kölbel (2002, 2004) and Lasersohn's (2005, 2017) conclusion remains intact.

I have already surveyed several problems for contextualism in this chapter; I return to them in much greater detail in *Chapter 3*. For now, the last problem I will consider here is that taste contextualism is at odds with a discourse fact discussed in Section 1.2. Recall the taste version of feature (5.) from Glassen's list: that ordinary people are perfectly capable of distinguishing taste judgments from judgments that are explicitly about someone's tastes. The internal consistency of certain compound sentences points directly at this distinction. For instance:

(12) I enjoy their french fries, but they are terrible.

The second clause of this sentence – 'they are terrible' – cannot be about the speaker's own tastes or gustatory experience. If it were, it would produce the same contradiction as:

(13) I enjoy their french fries, #but I do not enjoy their french fries.

A contextualist can avoid equating (12) with (13) by taking the second clause in (12) to describe the tastes of some other person or group. For instance, if the salient group is is "most people," then (12) is equivalent, on their view, to:

(14) I enjoy their french fries, but most people do not enjoy them.

Unlike (13), (14) is internally consistent. But this move fails once we tweak (12) to block the "most people" reading:

(15) Like most people, I enjoy their french fries, but they are terrible.

If the second clause of (15) describes the tastes of most people, it collapses into the contradiction in:

(16) Like most people, I enjoy their french fries, #but most people do not enjoy them.

According to taste contextualism, this just shows that the contextually salient person or group described in (15) must be someone besides the speaker or "most people." Perhaps, for instance, the speaker's addressee is salient. Or perhaps the speaker's dad is, or perhaps the local car mechanic, and so on. The contextualist can play this game, but it is a game they are bound to lose, since (15) can be further modified to preclude any contextualist reading:

(17) Like everyone else, I enjoy their french fries, but they are terrible.

Taste contextualists hold that taste judgments – such as the second clause in (17) – describe the tastes of some contextually supplied person or group. Thus, on their view, (17) must be equivalent to some sentence of the form:

(18) Like everyone else, I enjoy their french fries, #but *X* does not enjoy them.

The problem is that no choice of *X* makes (18) coherent; every substitution yields a contradiction.[41] Short of abandoning contextualism about taste judgments, the only remaining move is to claim that (17) also expresses a contradiction. Yet intuitively, (17) is internally consistent – and for the same reasons that (15) and (12) are. This strongly suggests that ordinary speakers can distinguish between taste judgments and judgments explicitly about people's tastes. And if they do, taste contextualism is very likely false.

Although I will return to the problems with contextualism in greater detail in *Chapter 3*, what I have said here should already make clear why the view – indeed, the only plausible form of taste descriptivism – is very likely false.

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[41] Any choice for *X* produces a sentence which expresses that *X* enjoys, and does not enjoy, the french fries. A proponent of taste contextualism may attempt to sidestep this result by choosing a person or group for *X* who is fictitious or idealized, such as Mary Poppins, or "the ideal taster." Either way, the problematic sentence becomes: 'like everyone else (real or imagined), I enjoy their french fries, but they are terrible.'

Suppose, then, for the sake of argument, that taste judgments are not typically used to describe facts. If taste descriptivism is false, what follows? Where does this leave us with respect to the expanded grammatological problem? If no form of taste descriptivism is tenable, then we are left with no satisfactory answer as to why taste, moral, and ordinary descriptive judgments have so many overlapping grammatical and logical properties. It will not do to say that they all have these properties in virtue of being *descriptive*, if taste descriptivism is false. Nor will it do to say that all three are *nondescriptive*, since ordinary descriptive judgments are plainly descriptive. In short, we cannot coherently maintain that all three are descriptive, and we cannot maintain that all three are nondescriptive. So – *what should we say*?

I will give my full answer in *Chapter 5*. For now, I can only indicate the form that I think any adequate solution must take. The grammatical and logical similarities between taste, moral, and ordinary descriptive judgments, I contend, are not explained by their being all of one kind – all descriptive or all nondescriptive – but by something very general about the contents of the mental states they express. Each of these judgments serves to *express a belief* – a commitment to the truth of a propositional content – even if the nature of the commitment can differ dramatically between contents with and without objective truth-values.[42] In this way, the grammatical and logical properties of judgments derive from the structural features of propositional content, rather than from the descriptive or nondescriptive intentions of speakers.

This approach accommodates the possibility of nondescriptive judgments (like taste judgments) while still recognizing ordinary descriptive judgments as genuinely descriptive. It breaks with the conventional assumption that all judgments are essentially descriptive, while continuing to respect that many are. Consequently, it proposes an account of the grammar and logic of judgment that is fundamentally *indifferent* to what is at stake between descriptivism and nondescriptivism.

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[42] This characterization of judgments as *belief-expressive* is intended as a high-level sketch; the full argument and formal apparatus appear in *Chapter 5*. There, I defend what I call *belief expressivism*: the view that to assert a judgment is to present oneself as having a mental state with a propositional, truth-evaluable content. This framework accommodates a full range of contents, from matters of taste to objective states of affairs, while preserving the shared grammatological properties that motivate the expanded grammatological problem. *Chapters 4* and *5* develop and clarify the operative distinction between contents that correspond to possible objective features of the world and those that do not. These later chapters also address questions concerning the semantics of belief, the nature of propositional content, and ordinary speakers' practical grounds for believing and asserting non-objective contents.

A solution along these lines is, in my view, the *only* way to solve the expanded grammatological problem. The problem demands that we identify some property *Y* that taste, moral, and ordinary descriptive judgments all share, in virtue of which they exhibit the grammatical and logical features they have in common. *Y* cannot be "they are all descriptive," nor can it be "they are all nondescriptive." And since *Y* must be compatible with both descriptive and nondescriptive judgments, it must be neutral with respect to that debate.

Here, in the roughest outline, is my proposal: the grammatical and logical properties shared by all judgments derive from the structure of propositional contents – from the manner in which predicates are attributed to (predicated of) objects. Whether a given judgment is descriptive or nondescriptive turns on whether ordinary speakers take its predicates to correspond to objective properties – features that objects can genuinely have, independent of anyone's perspective. On my view, taste predicates like 'delicious' and 'disgusting' do not correspond to objective properties. To assert that sushi is delicious is merely to express one's belief that sushi is delicious, without thereby alleging that this belief corresponds to a mind-independent fact. By contrast, ordinary descriptive predicates like 'green' *do* correspond, at least in part, to objective properties. To assert that grass is green is to express one's belief that grass is green – *and further*, it is to allege that this belief corresponds to a real state of affairs.

While the details of this view appear in *Chapter 5*, its broad contours place me in the company of the subclass of nondescriptivists known as minimalist expressivists, including Gibbard (2003) and Horgan and Timmons (2000, 2006). Notwithstanding objections to minimalism from Dreier (1996, 2004), MacFarlane (2007), and others, the upshot of the expanded grammatological problem is that moral descriptivists should reconsider minimalism – at least in order to accommodate taste judgments. For if taste judgments are not descriptive, then the grammatical and logical properties of judgments cannot inhere in virtue of being used to describe objective states of affairs. In Part II, I take up the antecedent of this conditional, expanding on the preliminary case sketched here to defend the claim that taste judgments are indeed not descriptive.