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Relativism about Truth and Predicates of Taste

Relativismo acerca da verdade e predicados do gosto

Barry C. Smith[1]
University of London

Abstract
Is relativism about truth ever a coherent doctrine? Some people have argued that an answer to this question depends on whether there can be cases of genuine disagreement where those who disagree hold conflicting beliefs towards the same proposition and yet are each entitled to say that what they believe is true. These have been called cases of faultless disagreement and are often explored by considering the case of disagreements about taste. However, this is not the right way to formulate the relativist's doctrine, and the discussions of taste are often based on a faulty view about the nature of taste and about the workings of predicates of taste. I examine the taste case in more detail and consider the prospects for a genuine form of truth relativism.

Key words: relativism, truth, taste, predicates of taste.

Resumo
O relativismo sobre a verdade é uma doutrina coerente? Alguns têm argumentado que uma resposta a esta questão depende se pode haver casos de desacordo genuíno, onde, aqueles que discordam, sustentam crenças conflitantes sobre a mesma posição e ainda estão autorizados a dizer que no que eles acreditam é verdade. Estes têm sido chamados casos de discordâncias perfeitas e são frequentemente explorados considerando os casos de desacordos sobre gosto. No entanto, esta não é a forma correta de formular a doutrina dos relativistas, e as discussões sobre gosto são frequentemente baseadas numa visão falha da natureza do gosto e do funcionamento dos predicados de gosto. Eu examino o caso do gosto com mais detalhes e considero perspectivas para uma forma genuína de relativismo sobre a verdade.

Palavras-chave: relativismo, verdade, gosto, predicados de gosto.

[1] Institute of Philosophy. School of Advanced Study. University of London. University of London. Senate House, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HU. United Kingdom. E-mail: barry.smith@sas.ac.uk.

Relativism and Disagreement

In philosophy, disagreements about what is morally right or wrong have long been used to motivate certain forms of relativism. The idea is that when intractable moral disputes arise between different groups there may be no neutral grounds on which to decide who is right. According to the relativist, there is no single standard or moral code to appeal to, and each side is equally entitled to the judgements they make in accordance with their own moral codes. So when two parties have considered all the relevant facts about a given issue and arrived at opposing verdicts, the correct thing to say might be that they are both right. Similar reasoning about disputes involving what is beautiful or ugly are used to motivate relativism about aesthetic values.

The question is whether the relativist's response to these disputes is coherent. Many think it isn't.[2] If we suppose an individual's judgement about a moral issue to be correct, then we usually take anyone who disagrees with that judgement to be wrong. However, if the relativist wants to say that two people can arrive at conflicting views about a given moral issue and both be right, the correct thing to say will be that each person's judgement is right according to his or her own moral code but wrong according to someone else's moral code. But what does it mean for a judgement to be right *according to a given moral code*? And do the judgements people make according to different moral codes really conflict? If one person is saying what is right according to their code, while the other person is saying what is right according to *their* code, each speaker may be correct in what they say and there won't be any real disagreement. As Bernard Williams (2002) pointed out, the solution relativism offers appears to dissolve the problem it was designed to address; i.e. the case where conflict arises from competing views of the same subject matter (Williams, 2002, p. 52).

Is relativism about truth a coherent doctrine? Some people have argued that an answer to this question depends on whether there can be cases of genuine disagreement where those who disagree hold opposing beliefs about the same subject matter and yet are both entitled to say that they believe something true. These are cases of so-called faultless disagreement (Kolbel, 2004). Is the idea of faultless disagreement coherent, and if not, are there any other viable forms of relativism? In what follows, I shall explore the prospect for relativism in the case of disagreements about matters of taste.

Disputing Matters of Taste

Due to the controversy of the moral case, where intuitions vary, relativists often turn to judgements of taste to try to make out a case for an intelligible form of relativism. The idea is to show the doctrine to be intelligible for judgements of taste and then to consider whether the semantic framework used to diagnose disputes in this domain can be applied to any others.

Let's look at a case involving so-called predicates of taste:

Charles says: (1) Sheep's eyes are delicious.
Barry says: (2) Sheep's eyes are not delicious, they're disgusting.

[2] Paul Boghossian is a leading opponent (Boghossian, 2006, 2011).

Is this a case of genuine disagreement about the taste of sheep's eyes? Both speakers certainly take themselves to be disagreeing, and if what they say is susceptible of truth and falsity, their claims appear to conflict. On the face of it, there is a proposition — that sheep's eyes are delicious — that Charles accepts and Barry rejects.

If one of them is right, the other has to be wrong. For if (1) is true and (2) is the denial of (1), then (2) cannot be true; and vice versa. Disagreement is clearly secured under these circumstances. But how can it be right to say, with the relativist, that both speakers are correct: that they are both saying something true? If one speaker says something true, and the other denies what he says, that second speaker must say something false. On the other hand, if what the second speaker says is correct then what the first speaker says, must be false. So how can both speakers be correct? If either speaker says something true, and the two speakers disagree, then the other speaker must be saying something false, but if both say something true, they say something both true and false, which is absurd. So talk of faultless disagreement appears to be incoherent. If the relativist wants to say that both Charles and Barry are right in their judgements, and neither is wrong (i.e. their judgements are faultless) then they cannot be disagreeing. If there was disagreement and one of them was right the other would have to be wrong, so we could not say, as faultless disagreement demands, that neither is wrong. If they are both right, their statements cannot conflict. Either they mean something different by 'delicious' or they are talking about slightly different subject matters. Charles may be talking about how sheep's eyes taste to him, and Barry may be talking about how sheep's eyes taste to him. Alternatively, what they say may be neither true nor false. We'll return to each of these options below.

Rejecting relativism while insisting that (1) and (2) are conflicting statements that have truth values requires us to say that only one of the speakers is right. But which one? Both speakers are entitled to make the claims they do about how delicious or not the sheep's eyes are. Each makes a judgement based on his own experience and responses, so why should we favour one over the other? This idea is what motivates faultlessness, and it is because there is no reason to privilege one person's opinion over another that the relativist was to say that both are right. But as we have seen, and without further qualification, we cannot say that.

Rejecting relativism may seem simple enough, but how satisfactory is the realist alternative? Is it right to say that just one of the parties to the dispute is correct even though neither we nor they have any grounds on which to adjudicate between the competing views? Must we suppose that neither we, nor the speakers, are ever in a position to tell who is right? That verdict would consign statements like (1) and (2) to the category of potentially undecidable statements such as Goldbach's conjecture (that every even number if the sum of two primes), or statements about inaccessible regions of space-time. A strange outcome, since surely people are better placed to decide whether something tastes good than they are to make claims about mathematical infinities or remote regions of space-time. The epistemological situation is quite different with judgements based on experience. People are able to judge whether something is delicious or not by tasting it, and they judge in accordance with their own tastes. So why not say that they are judging correctly if they judge what they taste is accordance with their own tastes? If we do say that, the truth about whether the dish tastes good is relative to the taste of whoever judges, and, according to the relativist, individuals making conflicting judgements each judge correctly.

Alternatively, denying that (1) and (2) have truth values enables us to say that it's not for epistemological reasons that we cannot settle the question of who is right. It's because there is nothing that settles it. There are no facts of the matter about which things are delicious; there are just likings expressed by each speaker. But once again there is no real basis for disagreement between the speakers. Of

course, there may still be practical tensions about which dish to order in a restaurant, whose likes to favour, and whether one is best placed to recommend a dish to others.

For many, this is a more plausible alternative to the relativist's position. So in assessing the prospects for relativism, a great deal depends on whether the judgements expressed by sentences involving taste predicates are capable of sustaining truth and falsity, and whether — if they are — they really do give rise to genuinely conflicting views about what is delicious, or disgusting.

In what follows, I will side with the relativist in supposing that judgements of taste, and the sentences that express them, can sustain claims to truth or falsity, and can give rise to genuine conflicts, but I argue that most relativist discussions of these cases are confused and the semantic diagnoses relativists and their opponents typically offer of such cases are usually based on:

(a) faulty views about predicates of taste and their subject matter
(b) faulty views about the nature of taste

We need to look at how predicates of taste function, but there's a prior question, seldom asked: how should the relevant class of predicates featuring in disagreements about matters of taste be demarcated and characterised? We'll turn to that issue in the third section. But before we do, let us consider the issue of whether judgements of the kind expressed by sentences such as (1) and (2) really do have truth-values.

Why It's Hard to Disagree

What are the grounds for claiming that statements like (1) and (2) lack truth-values? Some will say that there is no such thing as deliciousness in the food or liquids themselves: there is just liking and disliking by individuals. Others will say that it is because these judgements involve the subjective experiences of the taster that they cannot sustain truth or falsity. Let's consider both of these views.

It has often been assumed that there's a sharp difference between judgements concerning matters of fact and judgements concerning matters of taste, with judgements of the latter sort taken to be somehow deficient in objectivity, and therefore lacking in truth-value. *De gustibus non est disputandum,* as the familiar dictum has it.

But why think judgements of taste cannot be disputed and why suppose that sentences like (1) and (2) lack truth-values? The speakers who utter sentences like (1) and (2) certainly take themselves to be making assertions that express correct views about the food. Are the speakers radically mistaken in what they take themselves to be up to linguistically? If they are, one option is to appeal to a form of expressivism about evaluative discourse. This would secure a very close parallel between judgements of taste and moral judgements. The expressivist about morals thinks that utterances of declarative sentences containing moral predicates are not really assertions of belief but rather a way of evincing or expressing an attitude such as approval or disapproval; and perhaps the same position could be adopted by non-objectivists about judgements of taste.[3] Linguistically expressed judgements of taste would not express beliefs, but rather our inclinations or preferences.

[3] There are now many ways to formulate Expressivism. Alan Gibbard (1990) provides a clear example of the strategy of showing how moral judgements function to express a mental state other than a belief. More recently, expressivists have sought to show how normative sentences uttered in the indicative mood can have truth-values while still being used to express attitudes other than belief. See Blackburn (1993) and Schroeder (2008).

But we need not take this line if there is such a thing as correctly taking something to be delicious. Speakers engaged in a dispute about taste certain act as if there was such a property at issue, and as if they knew what it took to get judgements about it right. Speakers' grounds for making such judgements is the taste a food or liquid has and how their response to it. When making judgements about what's delicious, subjects are relying on subjective, often hedonic, responses to tell them whether a taste they are experiencing is delicious or not. Now, it might be thought that because subjectivity enters into the truth of what we judge when assessing a food's taste this will compromise the objectivity of what they judge. We certainly apply predicates of taste on the basis of experience, as we do colour predicates, but this need not mean that taste predicates are *about* our experiences, any more than colour predicates are about visual experiences. To judge *on the basis of* subjective experiences is not to say that such judgements are *about* those experiences. Tasters may rely on subjective experiences to reveal facts about a food or wine just as subjects may reply on subjective (auditory) experience to tell them that a cat has just made a shrill sound. Nevertheless, if speakers succeed in expressing something true when judging in accordance with their subjective responses to foods or liquids, and if there can be a variety of subjectivities across individuals or cultural groups, this may give rise to conflicting verdicts about whether something tastes delicious. The relativist will say that under these circumstances the differing judgements of individuals have an equally claim to be right. Charles and Barry will have different responses to the sheeps' eyes, and make different judgements of taste, but there is no way to privilege one response over another. However, as we have already seen the idea that they are both right while making conflicting statements is not coherent. So, somehow the difference in their subjective responses must account for differences in the subject matters of their judgements. However, we do not want to say that the judgements as just about these experiences, so how can we capture what is going on here?

The subjectivist alternative to relativism would deny that speakers' experiences put them in touch with the deliciousness or otherwise of what they taste. Instead it would see speakers as doing no better than offering *opinions*: opinions that are answerable to nothing other than themselves. The opinion of any individual will be answerable to purely subjective considerations of how that individual responds at any moment. Those subjective considerations may disclose no more than a subject's likings or dislikings, their personal tastes. Adapting a formulation of John MacFarlane (MacFarlane, 2007, 2009, 2012) (one he rejects), we might construe the rule for the application of the predicate 'delicious' to be:

(DP) Call something 'delicious' just in case its taste is pleasing to you.

Rule of use (DP) connects taste judgements and affective reactions. Judging something to be delicious is not a matter of perception but a matter of how what you perceive affects you hedonically. Taste judgements of this kind will guide the food choice of individual users, motivating them to eat what's pleasing, all else being equal. But what's pleasing involves our individual subjective natures only. Variation in our subjectivity would lead to different and equally valid opinions about what is delicious and would be at odds with the idea that 'delicious' picks out an objective property of a food or drink. There would, nevertheless, be room for claims like (1) to take truth-values depending on whether the taste of a given food or drink was pleasing to an individual speaker. However, there would no longer be a basis for genuine disagreement between speakers. Claims like (2) would be infelicitous in response to claims like (1), which would reflect the indexical nature of 'delicious'

as meaning *pleasing to me*. Strictly and literally, it would be inappropriate to say (1) was false. However, if a speaker hearing an utterance of (1), were simply to say:

(3) Sheep's eyes are not delicious

this could be true too but would not constitute a denial of (1), nor be in conflict with it despite surface appearances. This way of ensuring that statements made by uttering (1) or (3) can have truth-values — as indexical claims — fails to preserve the possibility of genuine disagreement between speakers of (1) and (2).

The relativist can do better than (DP) and besides there are reasons to reject it as the rule of use for 'delicious'. For instance, someone who suddenly loses their sense of taste could conclude that certain foods and drinks were still delicious and recommend them to others while recognising with regret that they were no longer pleasing to her. Equally, someone could judge from his current and superior vantage point that something he thought was delicious or disgusting when he was a child was not really delicious or disgusting, although it pleased or repelled him at the time.[4]

The gap that opens up between liking and deliciousness, between how we respond at a moment and our more considered judgements, leaves room for a response-dependent account of 'deliciousness' according to which something's being delicious depends on its relation to creatures like us, and depends on its eliciting a particular subjective response form us under certain conditions that count as the best conditions for getting the judgement right. This view enables us to say that not just any opinion settles what is delicious, only our best opinions will do.[5] However, if subjectivity enters into the way best opinions settle whether something is delicious, then, one again, where there is a variety of subjectivities across individuals or groups there may be different facts about what is delicious relative to each of the individuals or groups.

But why say there are different facts rather than different concepts? Why not say that Charles and Barry are using differently geared response-dependent concepts, given that they are tied to different responses under the same conditions? In effect, Charles is using the concept 'delicious for Charles' and Barry is using the concept, 'delicious for Barry'; or each is using the indexical concept 'delicious for me under certain conditions'. And if this is the case then, again, their dispute is pointless and there is no real disagreement.

There is, however, another non-relativist way to understand the divergence of opinions in judgements about taste based on a common line of reasoning. To see how it works we first have to point to a hidden structure in statements like (1)–(3). When we say of a particular drink:

(4) This wine is delicious

we are really expressing a truncated version of:

(5) [The taste of] this wine is delicious

On this view, predicates of taste, like 'delicious' would apply not directly to the things themselves, but to the *tastes* of things. Now a common line of reasoning goes as follows. You like a wine and I don't and you can't understand how I could fail to recognize the deliciousness of the wine. You think the only way to make sense

[4] The latter point is made by MacFarlane with respect to 'tasty'.
[5] Similar to Crispin Wright's view of psychological self-knowledge. See Wright (2001, p. 312).

of our different reactions is to suppose that the wine can't taste the same way to me as it does to you. If it tasted the same way to me as it did to you, so you reason, then I'd be bound to recognise that it was delicious. The difference in our reactions is due to the wine tasting different to each of us, and our applying 'delicious' to the tastes it has for each of us.

On this view, the way something tastes is a relative to, or a property of, individuals, a matter of the sensations each of has us when tasting a wine. The divergence in our verdicts would be intelligible if we were talking about different things, and this could be the case in (1) and (2). Charles would be talking about how he tastes the sheep's eyes, and Barry would be talking about how *he* tastes them, and they may not be the same, even if they agreed about how to apply the predicate 'delicious'.

But why assume that the dish or the wine tastes differently to each person? This only seems plausible if we do not make a sufficiently clear separation between tastes and liking. But once we do, there is an equally plausible diagnosis which assumes that the wine tastes the same, or relevantly similar, to you and to me, but that while you like that taste, I don't. The failure to separate taste and liking leads people to suppose that if liking changes then the taste something must change too. But there are good reasons to deny this conclusion and to insist of a firm separation between how something tastes and our hedonic responses to it. To begin with, we know these components of experience are processed in separate cortical areas of the brain (Kringelbach and Stein, 2010). People can also make consistent identity and intensity judgements despite their hedonic responses changing in cases of stimulus-specific satiety. For example, we may like eating chocolate and yet if we were continuously fed more and more pieces of chocolate there would come a time at which the hedonics would drastically alter and we would no longer find chocolate pleasant. This is not because we could not eat anything more. We would accept, with relief, a piece of cheese or fruit. This is stimulus-specific satiety and although the hedonic reaction to the chocolate changes as we are force-fed more and, we could still recognise if a different sort of chocolate was substituted at some point (O'Docherty *et al.*, 2000; Gottfried *et al.*, 2003). Taste is one thing, liking another. The wine's tasting a certain way and someone's finding it pleasurable don't have to go together. Thomas Reid makes a similar point when discussing his response to an excellent piece of music:

> This excellence is not in me; it is in the music. But the pleasure it gives is not in the music; it is in me. Perhaps I cannot say what it is in the tune that pleases my ear, as I cannot say what it is in a sapid body which pleases my palate; but there is a quality in the sapid body which pleases my palate, and I call it a delicious taste; and there is a quality in the tune that pleases my taste, and I call it a fine or excellent air (Reid, 1785, p. 456).

Notice that Reid locates the delicious taste in the sapid body. Should we follow him in this respect? We should certainly not distinguish deliciousness and liking. If we really do experience the same or similar tastes in a food or wine, then either the difference in our reactions shows a failure in one of us to correctly apply the predicate 'delicious', or that predicate merely expresses our personal preference for one taste rather than another, or some form of relativism is still an option. We already saw the reading of 'delicious' along the lines of (DP) above leaves no room for the distinction between something being *delicious* and its being *delicious to me*, and yet someone could say, in the face of a dispute with another about whether a wine was delicious, 'Well, it tastes delicious to me'. This is clearly a retraction based on a

more restricted claim than that which was originally made. So the predicate 'delicious' is not just a predicate of personal preference that expresses individual liking. Relativism or a failure on the part of Charles or Barry to recognise the deliciousness of the sheep's eyes are now the only options in view.

Distinct Predicates of Taste

At this stage, we might want to make a distinction between, on the one hand:

(i) predicates of personal taste, such as 'delicious', 'disgusting', 'tasty' 'appealing', 'thrilling', 'overpowering'

and, on the other hand:

(ii) taste-predicates proper, such as sweet', 'sour', 'bitter', 'citric', 'creamy', 'stale', 'spicy', 'minty', 'fruity', 'rancid'.

There is considerable agreement in our applications of the later class of predicates, suggesting that we can agree on the tastes we are judging, although there is much less agreement about the applications to these tastes of predicates of personal taste. This distinction offers a way to separate how things taste and whether they are to my taste.

One way to distinguish (i) and (ii) is to see taste-predicates as descriptive and predicates of personal taste as evaluative. There is a possibility of confusing these two kinds of predicates and the different kinds of judgement if we simply speak about predicates of taste. Perhaps speakers fail to distinguish cases like:

A: Sea urchin is sweet.
B: Sea urchin is not sweet (OR: No, it's not.)

where there is a fact of the matter about the taste of sea urchin, from cases like:

A: Sea urchin is delicious
B: Sea urchin is not delicious (OR: No, it's not.)

where we are dealing with an evaluative predicate. How should we deal with such evaluative predicates? Should they be classed with moral and aesthetic predicates? Are they expressive of attitudes or express commendations?

There is widespread and consistent agreement about the taste of banana, orange, melon, peppermint, mango, onion, etc, but frequent disagreement about whether each of these is delicious. Depending on one's view of evaluative terms we could say that taste-predicates in (i) can be used to make objective judgements and predicates of personal taste in (ii) can be used to make (partly) subjective judgements.

However, is it so easy to make clean a separation between descriptive and evaluative predicates? We can speak of a wine as balanced, but where does 'balance' fit into this scheme? A wine is balanced when all the elements that compose its flavour — the fruit, the alcohol, the acidy, the tannins — are all present in just the right propositions with no one of them dominating all the others. Wine makers aim for balance in a wine and it is hard to achieve. It is not just whatever one thinks it is. It is easy to detect, even for those who do not have the concept of a balanced wine. If you give novices two samples of a wine, where one is balanced and the other is

not, they will choose the balanced wine. However, there is no chemical formula for balance in a wine. It is sought out by experienced wine makers who know when they achieve it, and know when they don't. Perhaps we should say that balance is a thick concept: one that is partly descriptive and partly evaluative (Williams, 1985, p. 129-130). It is certainly a mark of quality in a wine. So perhaps we should call predicates like 'balanced' taste predicates of quality.

We could now create three classifications for predicates of taste:

(i) Taste-predicates: 'sweet' 'minty', 'fruity', 'state', 'creamy', 'rancid'
(ii) Predicates of personal preference: 'like' 'yummy' 'like'
(ii) Predicates of quality: 'balanced', 'harmonious', 'insipid', 'bland', 'complete', 'complex', 'elegant'

Predicates of type (i) would be descriptive objective, and predicates of type (ii) would be evaluative and subjective, but in between would be partly descriptive and partly evaluative predicates whose content involves a mixture of the subjective and objective. And now the question would be where do predicates like 'delicious' and 'disgusting' belong? Are they part of the third category (iii) of predicates of quality, or are they more like the personal and subjective category (ii)? People certainly use them with the aim of expressing more than personal liking, and as we saw, there is a distinction between liking and deliciousness because there is a distinction between 'It tastes delicious' and 'It tastes delicious to me'.

Before settling the question of where 'delicious' belongs, how sure can we be that the classifications between (i), (ii) and (iii) sort taste-predicates used to make objective judements and more evaluative predicates of taste? Is it right, for example, to compare taste-predicates of category (i) with colour predicates like 'blue' or 'purple'? One objection to doing so is raised by John MacFarlane, who has pointed to what he sees as a disanalogy between colours and tastes that calls into question objectivism about tastes. He states:

> As with tastes, people do not universally agree about colors. But when there is disagreement, they do not blithely continue to maintain their own views without hesitation. The fact that others report seeing a different color makes one hesitate in one's own color judgements. It makes one suspect that the lighting is funny, or that one is ill or under the influence of a drug. To insist in such a case that one's own judgement is right, and that the other's is wrong, would be rash and unwarranted. But when it comes to disagreement about whether something is "tasty," we find no comparable hesitation (MacFarlane, 2012, p. 141).

That's not quite right. One would hesitate in claiming that a dish was sour when no everyone else found it so. It may provide grounds for thinking one's health was not good. Alternatively, to find nothing sour, not even lemons, might lead one to wonder whether one had been given miracullin fruit berries that boosts the sweet receptors and temporarily masks the detection of sourness. The hesitation in disagreements about what is sour, in contrast with disagreements about what is tasty offers a contrast between predicates like 'sour' and predicates like 'tasty', showing us the need for the distinction we've made among predicates of taste.

By my lights, the disanology MacFarlane points to between basic colour terms and predicates of personal taste fails to undermine objectivism about the content of taste-predicates proper because the relevant comparison with 'tasty' is not basic colour predicates like 'blue' or 'red', but an evaluative predicate like 'brightly

coloured', or 'garish'[6]. Two people may agree about the colours in a fabric but disagree about whether it was colourful or bright, and here, just as in the case of judgements about what is tasty, there may be no hesitation in making one's judgements and no doubts about the lighting or the influence of a drug. The disanalogy MacFarlane sees between colours and tastes with respect to objectivity is based on a failure to compare like with like. Basic colour predicates like 'blue' or 'red' are more naturally comparable with basic taste-predicates like 'sweet' and 'sour' or 'savoury' and 'bitter', about whose use we would surely show some hesitation if others disagreed with us. The parallel is pretty exact here: 'colourful' or 'lurid' stands to 'red' as 'tasty' stands to ''sour', and at the basic level at least colours and tastes can be classed together. [7] The class of taste-predicates extends beyond basic taste terms to include simple flavours that we experience not as a result of taste receptors alone but by means of smell, touch and trigeminal stimulation, such as 'citric', 'creamy', 'stale', 'spicy'. There is large and consistent agreement about the taste of banana, orange, melon, peppermint, mango, onion, and so on. There are *single*, not simple or basic tastes like sweet, sour, umami. For all these terms there is reason to suppose people's judgements about when they are present gets matters right.

We can still have disagreements about the descriptive predicates but this may be due to different thresholds for detection in different subjects. And besides, we shouldn't over-state the extent of disagreement. There is widespread agreement that spoiled milk is disgusting.

There also appears to be a connection between the applications of the two kinds of predicates. Excessive use of salt or sugar can mean a dish is no longer delicious. We also use this connection to make predictions about others:

Arthur: The soup looks delicious
Barry: You won't like it, it's spicy

What is the basis of taste judgements expressed with taste-predicates? Are they just about us or about the foods we consume? If the sense of taste (the flavour system) simply allowed you to say what something tastes like to you, and not how it is, it would be quite unlike the other senses. Can a banana taste to you like an orange does to everyone else? If so, there would be something wrong with you - or with the banana.

The simple view of tastes, as individual sensations, is based on a faulty vie of the nature of tastes and tasting. What we call 'taste' is in fact the result of at least three sensory inputs: taste, touch and smell. In addition, we can have tasting experiences triggered by stimulation of the trigeminal or facial nerve, which makes mustard taste 'hot' and peppermint taste 'cool' even though there is no change of temperature in the mouth. So flavour is always an amalgam of different sensory inputs. Consider what we call the 'taste' of menthol: it is always a minty aroma, a bitter taste and cooling sensation in the mouth. This involves olfaction, gustation and activation of the trigeminal nerve. The resulting product is a fusion (confusion?) of these inputs better known as flavour. But what are flavours? A flavour percept in tasting a liquid is the result of multi-sensory integration of olfactory, tactile and taste impressions. These are modulated by the timing and differences of differently located sensory stimuli in the mouth and the liquid travelling across the palate. Tasting has a dynamic time-course that plays a part in the perception of flavours and aromas.

[6] I'm grateful to Chris Barker for the suggestion of 'bright' as a corresponding predicate of colour.
[7] Not everyone would agree to this talk of basic taste terms in comparison with colour terms. See Byrne and Hilbert (2008).

How then can one reconcile these delicately changing experiences with the idea of flavours belonging to the liquid and dependent on the compounds responsible for the particular qualities and characteristics of that liquid? That is a hard question but I believe it can be answered (Smith, 2012). They are not merely chemical properties, but they do supervene on the chemical properties, and the complexity in the ways people perceive flavours leaves plenty of room for individual difference. And yet for a large class of cases there is widespread agreement. These unified flavour percepts appear to track, fairly, reliably, properties of foods and liquids in the environment. So no threat to objectivism about such tastes or flavours has yet been made out. Of course, objectivism about what's delicious or tasty is still moot.

But are things as simple and clear-cut as this classification of predicates of taste suggests, or are there mixed cases? Are all the uses of taste-predicates in (i) purely descriptive? John MacFarlane (p.c.) has objected to the line of response I offered above by saying that he could have used the gradable adjective 'salty' instead of 'tasty' to make out the same case (even while acknowledging differences between 'tasty and 'salty'). How sweet does something have to be, MacFarlane asks, to count as sweet? There is a difference in the evaluative status of 'tasty' and 'sweet' but according to MacFarlane there is a minimal evaluative aspect to 'sweet' and 'salty', and this is enough to distinguish them from basic colour predicates.

Where I would agree with MacFarlane is that there are *some* uses of 'salty' have an evaluative aspect, but by no means all do. The predicate 'salty' appears to be ambiguous and support both descriptive and evaluative uses. Compare the following cases:

Ernie: I need to eat something salty.
Barry: Try these anchovies, they're salty.
cf.
Ernie: Do you like the stew?
Barry: No, it's salty.

The crucial consideration here is how we treat constructions like STEM+Y. Some lexical STEM+Y items are only descriptive, for instance: 'minty', 'meaty', 'fruity'. Others are only evaluative, with different valences: smelly (always bad), tasty (always good): that's why we have to say *smells good* and *tastes bad*, as Krifka's nice analysis of these cases brings out (Krifka, 2010). He shows that the default cases for smell and taste terms are bad and good respectively.[8]

There are good reasons to say that 'salty' supports both uses. It can be descriptive and mean *contains salt*, or can be evaluative and mean *contains too much salt*. Notice that people have (different) thresholds that set what they can detect as being salty in each case, and for what they consider too much salt. A lot has to do with the levels of salt in their saliva. This will create individual differences in the assessments of 'salty' and may give rise to a worry that relativism lurks even in the descriptive case. 'Salty' is a gradable adjective like 'tall' and the relevant standard can be set in different ways. Cultural facts about cuisine, for example, often dictate the standard of what it is for something to be salty. The same dish can be salty in the evaluative sense, for Australians but just right for the Japanese, while for sweet dishes some can be just right for Australians and too sweet for the Japanese. (Notice that for the predicates 'sweet' we need to add 'too sweet' and as Jerry Fodor once pointed out we know something that is 'too F' is no good just because of the semantics of 'too'.

[8] See Krifka (2010) for a very insightful analysis into the linguistic behaviour and hedonic qualities of olfactory and gustatory terms.

There is a sense of 'salty' that will do for comparison with 'red', and there is another sense - as a predicate of personal taste - which is evaluative in the way 'tasty' is (although it has negative valence), and according to me, that sense of 'salty', functions more like 'brightly coloured' or 'garish' and so not like 'red' or 'blue'.

By contrast, X is red, or X is bitter, or X is putrid are descriptive claims, in a way X is bright, X or X is tasty are not. These more evaluative predicates may have a compromised objectivity, depending on one's views of evaluative discourse, but objectivity about tastes based on the use of descriptive predicates of the first kind is not impugned.

However, the lurking relativism would surface if we asked, is the dish tasted by the Japanese and Australians salty or not. Is there any non-relative answer to this question? We will return to cases like these below.

The Objectivity and Subjectivity of Predicates of Taste

Having sorted taste-predicates proper from predicates that express personal preferences, it is time to return to the issue of where predicates of personal taste like 'delicious', 'disgusting', 'tasty', 'appealing', 'thrilling', 'overpowering' belong. Do they belong in third category of predicates with terms like 'balanced' said of a wine? Certainly they are not straightforwardly objective or descriptive predicates like 'red' or 'bitter'. This is why we need to categorise the different types of predicates of taste carefully. However, unlike 'balance' where these is both widespread agreement about its application and a sense of what is required to achieve it, deliciousness seems to involve widespread variability in application across consumables for different tasters. So what should we say about it?

Somehow we have to capture the objectivity and subjectivity involved in judgements of taste, and the possibility of genuine disagreement. As MacFarlane has put it, such judgements seem to depend not just on how things are with the object, but how they are with the subject. At the same time, we have seen that subjects are not just describing their subjective experiences, or their likes and dislikes, in calling something delicious. Instead, they seem to be trying to get something right that requires accurate judgement, and this is something they take themselves to be in a position to judge correctly. We could see tasters as judging in accordance with a somewhat demanding standard. It is not just whatever they take to be delicious that counts as such. In this way, we can see the truth of such judgements as depending on an experiencer or judge who operates with certain standards of taste in the context of utterance. So should we see the claims made by Charles and Barry as relativised to a standard of taste? For some this is enough to invite a form of relativism about truth.

An utterance of a sentence of the form 'W is delicious' would be true relative to a judge if W accords with the standard of taste adopted by the judge. Or, if one wants to avoid utterance-truth we can cast the claim in terns the truth of a proposition P expressed by the utterance of a sentence at a context:

(Judge-rel)
P is true as asserted at C iff P is true at <Wc, Sc>,
where Wc = the world of C and Sc is the standard
of taste adopted at C by the appropriate judge.

But if each speaker is the judge relative to their own context of utterance, and if each speaker appeals to different standards is judging whether sheep's eyes

are delicious, the truths they express are not incompatible and no disagreement ensues. As long as each speaker takes himself to be the appropriate judge they can give different truth values to the same sentence at a given context. What they are arguing about is of the form, 'I know best', 'No, I know best', and while there is something right about this way of seeing things, it does not constitute full-blown relativism. For we can say, in absolute terms, Charles is right relative to his standard of taste and Barry is right relative to his standard of taste, and if each recognises the situation there need be no further disagreement between them.

Relativism Proper

To be a relativist about truth one has to preserve what is genuinely incompatible in disputes of the kind we have been considering so far. The problem that arises in the case of judgements of taste is that we have no reason to impugn either speaker's verdict, and yet it is incoherent to suppose that the speakers are making incompatible claims but both saying something true. To capture the sense in which their claims are incompatible, we need to understand that there is no un-relativised verdict to be given on who is right. That is, there can only be one standard according to which sheeps' eyes are delicious or not. If there are two different standards in play with respect to which we assess the truth of falsity of the claim, there need be no disagreement. The statement that sheeps' eyes are delicious can be true relative to one standard, but false relative to another. However, relativism proper arises when there is one standard with respect to which we assess the statement for truth or falsity, and with respect to which the contents of the sentences uttered by Charles and Barry cannot both be true at the same time. However, we have no reason to favour the standard adopted by either Charles or Barry. But we can follow John MacFarlane's lead and introduce contexts of assessment, perhaps that of one of the speakers, but perhaps of some third party or on-looker, with respect to whose standard of taste we assess what Charles and Barry said. At no context of assessment can what they both said be true, and there is no absolute point of view from which to judge which context of assessment wins out. Relative to one context of assessment, what Charles says is true, and relative to a different context of assessment, what Barry says is true. There is no unrelativised perspective from which decides the truth of the matter. It is just a mistake to express relativism as the view that when one speaker accepts and the other rejects the same proposition, both can be right. This is to assume an absolute point of view from which we try to see the entitlement both speakers have to their opposing claims. However, a true relativist should deny there is any such standpoint. We can only assess the rightness of each speaker's claim relative to a particular context of assessment where only one standard of taste is involved.

To accept MacFarlane's account is to suppose that there are propositions whose truth is assessment sensitive. Assessment sensitivity of propositions in a given domain is what makes for relativism about truth for that discourse.

(AS) Assessment-sensitivity

A proposition P is assessment-sensitive iff for some contexts C1, C2, C3, P is true as used at C1 and assessed from C2, but not true as used at C1 and assessed at C3.

To be a relativist about a given domain, therefore, is to suppose that there are assessment-sensitive propositions in that domain whose truth is settled as follows:

(Rel)
P is true as used at Cu and assessed from Ca iff
P is true at <Wc_u, Sa>, where Wc_u = the world of
Cu and Sa is the assessor's standard
of taste at Ca (or the standard of taste picked
out by the assessor's intentions and the
objective situation at Ca.
(MacFalane 2007, p. 11).

We now see what was wrong with the idea of 'faultless disagreement'. The idea of both parties to a dispute being right invokes an absolutist idea that there is a perspective - the Olympian stance - from which we can see both speakers are right and entitled to what they say relative to the contexts from which they assert. According to the true relativist outlook there is no such neutral vantage point. There is no perspective from which one can accept both:

(A) W is delicious
(B) W is not delicious

These propositions are incompatible and the *accuracy* of each speaker's claim is itself assessed relative to a given context of assessment. However, the problem does not go away entirely. For surely, if the speakers of the object language were brought to understand the content of the sentences they uttered and how they were assessed for truth from different contexts of assessments, they could recognise that while what they said was true from one context of assessment, it could be false if assessed from another context of assessment.[9] So on what grounds do they believe they are entitled to claim that they right and the other speaker is wrong? Only if the contexts of assessment according to which what they say is true are the *right* contexts from which to assess what they say. But what makes them entitled to this claim, and what determines which context of assessment is the right one? MacFarlane's account is silent on this point and it is important to his account that nothing about the context of utterance or circumstances of evaluation settles the context of assessment. Of course, as speaker could recognise something in the relativist's outlook by saying that had another context of assessment been the relevant one from which to assess his claim, the other speaker, with whom he disagrees, would have said something true. That's because another standard of taste would have been operative.

Although this account of semantic relativism does better than the indexical (or non-indexical) contextualisms (MacFarlane, 2009) that are motivated by talk of faultlessness, by my lights, this does not locate the source of their disagreement or the nature of the continued dispute in the right place. Charles and Barry are not in any sense arguing about which context of assessment is the right one from which to evaluate their claims. Nor are they disputing which standard of taste – which may clearly settle the matter of truth in this case – they should adopt. Rather, they both believe there is a standard in play, a standard that would ground the objectivity of their claims, and by reference to which it would still make sense to pursue the dispute about this case. They are not supposing there is a standard they both share. They are supposing there is a standard and that each of them is deploying it correctly in this case and that the other is not. What is hard to determine is when a

[9] I am grateful to Matias Gariazzo for bringing this point to my attention and for discussion on the possible responses to this objection.

speaker is still using the same standard but misapplying it in a given case, or whether they have departed from the standard and deployed a subtly different one. Maybe even the speakers themselves cannot tell which of these courses they are following. Each believes that by his current judgement in the given case he is planting the flag correctly and staying on the right side of the boundary the standard creates between cases which meet the standard and those which don't, and believes that the other is not. The details of the semantics have yet to be worked out but this is, I believe, a more promising way of diagnosing the disagreement between speakers in judgements of taste. So does any form of relativism remain when we see things in this way? I think there is still room for relativism and I shall conclude by saying a few things to motivate that thought.

What is it to judge that some instance of a tasted food or liquid meets the standard to be correctly classed as delicious? Assessors could have agreed on how to assess claims over a wide range of cases and yet still diverge over a given instance. The key question is whether they would still be operating with the same standard they had in play up until now? If they had enjoyed widespread agreement and then diverged over some new and puzzling case would this be grounds for thinking that they had never really agreed in the past? Their standard of taste could coincide and overlap but come apart in the new case they confront: sheep's eyes, say. Agreement and disagreement can be asymmetrical and Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009) point out. Agreeing over a range of cases does not mean that they shared a standard, nor does their disagreement over a different range of cases show that they never agreed previously.

Nevertheless, assuming that they subscribe to the view that there is a single standard governing judgements of deliciousness and also believe that their past agreements give reason to suppose they have both been operating in accordance with that standard, it could now be asked how we should diagnose the disagreement over a novel food. We, and they, are faced with the problem of whether their disagreement is over whether the given case meets the standard, or there has been an adoption of a new and different standard. It could also be the case that they never adopted the same standard but only coincided until now, as in the cases Cappelen and Hawthorne discuss for 'tall'. But a final option opens up the possibility of a genuine form or relativism. What if each of their ways of way of behaving in this novel case constitutes a continuation or extension of the (same) standard. If that were really possible, we could say that each of them is entitled to consider himself right and the other wrong. Depending of which perspective one adopts, one will be right, the other wrong, and there be no unrelativised perspective from which to choose which perspective is right. If so, this would constitute a genuine relativism about taste. Each speaker will see himself as the keeper of the truth faith, continuing the erstwhile standard they had both previously subscribed to. A close parallel may be the case of Supreme Court judges having to decide whether some given case is covered by the statutes or not, and where each judge believes that he or she has better grounds for considering the verdict to be compatible with the previous understanding of the law.

Some readers may recognise a parallel between this discussion and the case of rule-following discussed by Wittgenstein in the Philosophical Investigations on whether the rule-governed use of a word in application to a new case counts as going on in the same way as before. The parallels should not be surprising when we realise that we are dealing with standards for the application of a predicate, and that some of the same considerations in the meaning case transfer to judgements of taste[10]. Once we have swept away all the distractions created by the often

[10] For more on the parallel with rule-following and consideration of actual cases of disagreements about taste see Smith (2010).

overlooked complexity in judgements of taste we can see how the possibility of a genuine relativism about matters of taste may depend on issues that also arise in the case of the rule-following considerations, and on what we have to say there. Relativism about taste remains a real possibility but a case for it has still to be made out in convincing detail.

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