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# Taste Disagreements and Predicates of Personal Taste

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**TASTE DISAGREEMENTS AND PREDICATES OF  
PERSONAL TASTE**

A Dissertation Presented

by

HEIDI TERES BUETOW

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Philosophy

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*To my father, who has always believed in me.*

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## ABSTRACT

# TASTE DISAGREEMENTS AND PREDICATES OF PERSONAL TASTE

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In this work, I explore the role of taste disagreements in the debate about the semantics of predicates of personal taste. Linguistic data derived from examples of gustatory disagreement often plays a major role in deciding the correct semantics of taste. I claim that, contrary to the trend in the recent literature, taste disagreements should not play any part in this debate. I argue that the data can be accommodated independently of the semantics by a theory of the purpose of “subjective” disagreements, such as taste disagreements. In support of this claim, I develop such a theory—one that includes an appeal to distinctively gustatory norms. I demonstrate how this theory can be applied equally well to the two major competing semantic theories—relativism and contextualism—to explain taste disagreements. If I am correct, this discovery represents a substantial contribution to the dialectic because it offers



philosophers and linguists decisive motivation to discontinue their reliance on disagreement data in the debate about the semantics of taste.

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# CHAPTER 1

## FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

### 1.1 Introduction

Recently, a group of unique expressions—expressions including predicates of personal taste such as ‘tasty’—have piqued the interest of both linguists and philosophers. Interest in these terms is generated in large part by the fact that these expressions appear to strain the familiar semantic framework of Lewis and Kaplan. In Lewis and Kaplan’s view, truth values of sentences are assigned relative to a context of utterance and a circumstance of evaluation that normally includes a possible world. However, it is unclear as of yet how to accommodate perspectival information such as standards of taste in this framework. Accommodating these terms is especially challenging because they appear to give rise to puzzling linguistic data in certain contexts of use, most notably in contexts of disagreement. In particular, some researchers claim that disagreements involving predicates of personal taste are ‘faultless’ in a way that normal disagreements are not.<sup>1</sup> The challenge, then, is to provide a semantic approach to perspectival information that allows for faultless disagreement.

One common answer to this challenge, contextualism, attempts to explain faultless disagreement by arguing that predicates of personal taste are “context sensitive,” i.e., that sentences containing them express different propositions in different contexts. However, it has been argued that, given the contextualist approach, taste disagreements devolve into situations in which the participants hopelessly talk past

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<sup>1</sup>For examples of philosophers and linguists interested in faultlessness, see Kölbel, 2003; Lasnik, 2011; MacFarlane, 2007; and Stevenson, 2007.

one another. Because of this problem, it appears that contextualists may not be able to offer a satisfactory explanation for taste disagreements. The apparent failure of contextualism on this count has led some philosophers—relativists—to modify Kaplan and Lewis’s systems further in order to accommodate predicates of personal taste. According to relativism, sentences containing perspectival information express the same proposition in every context in which they are uttered. The truth of these propositions is relative to something like a taste perspective or standard of taste. Relativists claim that their view fares better than contextualism in explaining faultless disagreement. However, it appears that relativism faces its own challenges. In particular, relativists must explain how it could ever be appropriate for individuals with different standards to disagree given that truth is relative to a standard of taste.

### **1.1.1 My goal in this chapter**

I will argue that relativists have been too quick to pronounce victory over contextualists. To begin with, relativism has its own problems capturing faultless disagreement for predicates of personal taste. Furthermore, relativists have often characterized faultlessness in a way that unfairly biases the debate against contextualism from the beginning.

In what follows, I will first introduce the problem of faultless disagreement as it is often presented in the literature on predicates of personal taste. After laying out some preliminary semantic background, I will show how faultless disagreement appears to cause problems for contextualism and relativism alike, at least the most basic versions of these theories. Finally, I will argue that faultlessness itself is a problematic notion by pointing out several ways in which assumptions about the nature of faultlessness can unfairly bias the debate.

I believe that it is worth spending time on these basic versions of contextualism and relativism, along with the basic version of the puzzle of faultless disagreement.

This is because it is often these basic versions that are in play in the current literature on predicates of personal taste. I hope that by doing so I will demonstrate the need to examine more sophisticated versions of these theories, along with the need to give a clearer presentation of the puzzle itself.

## 1.2 The Puzzle of Faultless Disagreement

### 1.2.1 Disagreements about empirical matters

As much as I hated to admit it, the disagreement between Ed and me in (1) was all too easily resolvable.

(1) Heidi: Guinness only contains 60 calories. So drink up!

Ed: Sorry, but that's not true. Guinness doesn't only contain 60 calories.

It says on the bottle that it contains 120 calories.

Heidi: All right then, I was wrong.

Besides being easily settled, this conversation is also semantically straightforward given the standard semantic system of Kaplan and Lewis.<sup>2</sup> In the context of (1), Ed and I made utterances that expressed propositions with contradictory contents. Only one of us can be right. What determines who is right? In the standard semantic framework, truth values for propositions are assigned relative to a world—in our case, the actual world. Unfortunately for me, because of the way the world is, Ed's utterance is true while mine is false.

### 1.2.2 Disagreements about matters of taste

Not every disagreement is so easily resolved. Contrast (1) with the conversation that Sam, Ed, and Jim had at the bar in (105).

(2) Sam: Is there anything good on tap?

---

<sup>2</sup>Kaplan, 1989b; Lewis, 1980.

Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all! Guinness, though—now that's tasty.

At first glance, disagreements about matters of taste appear to be very different from disagreements about empirical matters of fact. Although Jim's claim appears to be the negation of Ed's, it seems that Ed and Jim are each in some sense *faultless* in their assertions.<sup>3</sup>

It would seem that the source of the difference between (1) and (105) lies in the fact that the truth of the claims in (105) depends somehow on a certain kind of “perspectival” information—a standard of taste or a taste experience—in addition to the way the world is otherwise. The interesting question is, how does the truth of perspectival claims depend on a standard of taste, and whose standard is relevant? If the standard semantic framework determines truth for propositions based only on the way the world is, how can it deal with the kind of perspectival information present in disagreements of the kind exemplified by (105)?

### 1.3 Preliminaries

In order to highlight the mystery involved with predicates of personal taste, it will help to know more about the nature of these expressions. It will also be useful for us to take a closer look at the semantic framework of Kaplan and Lewis. Sections 1.3.1–1.3.3 will be devoted to discussing these preliminary issues.

#### 1.3.1 Perspectival expressions

In order to understand the puzzle surrounding the semantics of predicates of personal taste, it is helpful to note that predicates of personal taste are not alone in

---

<sup>3</sup>There is some debate about the origin of the expression “faultless disagreement.” The name appears to have come from Kölbel, 2003, though the notion itself appears in Wright as early as 1992. I will discuss what it means for a disagreement to be “faultless” in chapters 2 and 3.

causing difficulty for Lewis and Kaplan’s picture. Similar challenges arise in a variety of domains, including epistemic modals, aesthetic predicates, and knowledge attributions. More controversially, they also appear to arise for future contingents and moral claims. Each of these areas poses some challenge to the standard semantic framework. In each area, a special problem exists regarding how to assign a truth value to sentences containing the relevant expressions—expressions such as ‘beautiful,’ ‘might,’ ‘knows,’ etc. With the exception of future contingents, most of these expressions give rise to puzzles involving disagreement, and each of them poses a special kind of difficulty for Kaplan and Lewis’s account that appears to go beyond the usual trouble of handling context-sensitive expressions.<sup>4,5</sup>

It could be that these expressions pose a *prima facie* difficulty for the standard because they share a salient feature. Some analyses implicitly suggest that these expressions share a common element. For instance, Max Kölbel and Jonathan Schaffer characterize these expressions as being somehow “perspectival.”<sup>6</sup> Crispin Wright sometimes refers to them as expressions that are involved in “disputes of inclination.”<sup>7</sup> Peter Lasersohn describes them as involving “an illimitable element of subjective judgment or opinion.”<sup>8</sup> And MacFarlane suggests that such expressions are “assessment

---

<sup>4</sup>It is difficult to say exactly what marks these expressions as unusual. Moltmann, 2010, argues that we must distinguish between two kinds of context-dependent expressions: type 1, which includes many of the expressions I label as “perspectival expressions”; and type 2 expressions, which include terms like ‘right,’ ‘left,’ ‘local,’ and ‘neighboring.’ One of the diagnostics she gives for distinguishing type 1 terms from type 2 terms is their ability to generate cases of faultless disagreement. However, other diagnostics are available for distinguishing these terms that are not discussed in this chapter, including what she calls “sharing” and “faulty agreement.”

<sup>5</sup>By “the usual difficulties” I have in mind expressions like indexicals or demonstratives. However, it might be a mistake to cordon off what I am calling “perspectival expressions” from other context-sensitive items, because even some of these terms are becoming candidates for the same treatments as perspectival expressions. See Heck (2011) for some discussion of this issue.

<sup>6</sup>Kölbel, 2008, and Schaffer, 2009.

<sup>7</sup>Wright, 2008.

<sup>8</sup>Lasersohn, 2009.

sensitive,” in that the truth of sentences that contain them is somehow sensitive to the context of assessment.<sup>9</sup>

It is obvious that although each of these characterizations attempts to latch on to some interesting features of one or more of these expressions, none of them will uniformly fit all of the expressions of interest. In addition, some of the characterizations will carry certain linguistic or metaphysical assumptions that ought to be separated from the semantics issues. For ease of exposition, however, I will use the term ‘perspectival expressions’ to refer to this class of expressions. In chapter 4 I will return to the issue of what it means for an expression such as ‘tasty’ to be “perspectival.” Although my work here focuses on predicates of personal taste, it will sometimes be useful to draw comparisons between these predicates and perspectival expressions such as epistemic modals and moral terms. In the end, though my arguments are intended to be limited to predicates of personal taste, it is possible that they could be extended to other perspectival expressions as well.

### **1.3.2 Predicates of personal taste**

#### **1.3.2.1 What are predicates of personal taste?**

What exactly are predicates of personal taste? As Lasersohn points out in his 2005 article, this is a difficult question to answer. As of yet, no one has supplied a formal characterization of these predicates. It is common for philosophers and linguists to distinguish predicates of personal taste with an appeal to philosophical intuitions about what grounds the truth of claims containing these predicates (assuming that such claims are truth applicable). For instance, Lasersohn says that such predicates depend on matters of opinion instead of on matters of fact. He then points to ‘tasty’ and ‘fun’ as paradigmatic examples of such predicates:

---

<sup>9</sup>Macfarlane, 2009a.

To many of us who teach introductory semantics courses, the following may be a familiar experience: Early in the course, when one introduces the idea of truth conditions, and of trying to formulate rules assigning truth conditions to sentences in a systematic way, students will frequently ask, “But what about sentences that aren’t about matters of fact, but are really just matters of opinion?”<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, MacFarlane cites subjectivity as the distinguishing feature of predicates of personal taste.

It has often been proposed that claims about what is funny, delicious, or likely are “subjective,” in the sense that their truth depends not only on how things are with the objects they explicitly concern, but on how things are with some subject not explicitly mentioned.<sup>11</sup>

In chapter 4 I will argue that philosophers and linguists have been too quick to build assumptions about the non-objectivity of taste claims into their characterizations of predicates of personal taste. However, the *appearance* of subjectivity, in particular the fact that predicates of personal taste appear to depend on a(n) individual’(s) perspective, does at least seem to play a role in distinguishing predicates of personal taste. For now, we can think of predicates of personal taste as follows:

**Predicates of Personal Taste (PPT):** predicates where the semantic value appears to depend in some way on a taste perspective.

This characterization is meant to be neutral with regard to the objectivity of taste claims and with regard to what constitutes a taste perspective. Again, I will return to the issue of grounding in chapter 4.

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<sup>10</sup>Lasersohn, 2005, p. 643.

<sup>11</sup>MacFarlane, 2007, p. 1.

Presumably, there are a variety of predicates that exemplify predicates of personal taste. In that case, it is notable that it has become standard for philosophers and linguists to look to examples involving ‘tasty’ rather than ‘tastes good’ as in (3) or ‘is good’ as in (4).<sup>12</sup>

(3) Budweiser tastes good.

(4) Budweiser is good.

Lasersohn appeals to ‘tasty’ and ‘fun’ rather than to aesthetic predicates such as ‘beautiful’ or even evaluative predicates such as ‘good’ because he claims the latter are more “philosophically charged.”<sup>13</sup> Though perhaps the term ‘tasty’ appears less frequently and seems less natural than ‘tastes good’ or ‘is good’ in ordinary discourse, it seems to generate the strongest intuitions of faultlessness. For example, contrast (5) with (6).

(5) Jack: Budweiser is tasty.

Wally: I disagree. Budweiser is made with very poor ingredients.

Jack: That may be true, but it’s still tasty.

(6) Jack: Budweiser is good.

Wally: I disagree. Budweiser is made with very poor ingredients.

Jack: That may be true, but it’s still good.

Although both of these dialogues are possible, arguably the intuition of faultlessness is clearer in (5) than (6). Because my aim in this chapter is to explore initial intuitions about faultless disagreement, I will continue to focus on examples involving

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<sup>12</sup>This trend holds even among philosophers and linguists, such as Stephenson, who hold that ‘tasty’ is equivalent to ‘tastes good.’ See Stephenson, 2007.

<sup>13</sup>Some philosophers and linguists treat predicates of personal taste as kinds of aesthetic predicates. For example, see Egan, 2010.



‘tasty’ for the time being. However, I will revisit this issue in chapter 4, where I will explore the relationship between intuitions of faultlessness and assumptions about the subjectivity of taste claims.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.3.3 The semantic framework of Kaplan and Lewis

In order to fully understand the puzzle of faultless disagreement for predicates of personal taste, we must view it against the backdrop of the semantic frameworks of Lewis and Kaplan. Lewis and Kaplan have both argued that sentences cannot be assigned truth values directly. For instance, consider a sentence like (7).

(7) I am thirsty.

This sentence is true when uttered by Jack who is waiting to be served at the bar, but false when uttered by Mac who has just finished a pint. Or consider (8).

(8) Jack is drinking at a bar, but he might not have been.

Arguably, the truth of (8) depends not only on whether Jack is sitting at a bar in our world but also on there being some other world in which he is not. Or consider (9).

(9) Mac drank all of the beer!

Presumably, (9) is true if we are discussing only the beer in Mac’s fridge, but false if we are discussing all of the beer in the world.

How are sentences assigned truth values, and what sorts of things affect the truth values? In all of these cases, context plays a role in determining truth. However, there are different types of context sensitivity and various systems for accommodating it. David Lewis and David Kaplan have similar strategies for context sensitivity, but they differ on some of the details. It is usual for those entering into the debate about

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<sup>14</sup>Personally, I get more of an intuition of faultlessness with (6) if I say “*so* good” instead of “good.” My guess here is that this because the “so” leads you to focus on the experience of the individual rather than the qualities of the beer.

taste predicates to use Kaplan’s framework as a starting point. However, because details often matter, I will offer a background that includes elements of both Lewis’s and Kaplan’s views. Because Lewis offers a very intuitive picture of the different ways in which contextual features are relevant to the truth of sentences in English, I will begin with his account. I will go on to use Kaplan’s system to demonstrate one way in which the elements Lewis distinguishes can factor into sentential truth. Because most philosophers who write about the semantics of taste predicates use Kaplan’s system to frame the debate, I will rely on Kaplan’s framework to present the puzzles of disagreement. However, it is important for us to be familiar with Lewis’s system because I will make use of some of Lewis’s insights in the final chapters when I offer my solution to the puzzles of disagreement.

### 1.3.3.1 Meaning and semantic value

Before we explore Lewis’s picture, it will be helpful for me to say something about *meaning*. One natural way to describe the difficulty involved in the cases above is to say that the meanings of the sentences and of their constituent terms are affected by contextual features. However, as Lewis points out, using a term like ‘meaning’ is misleading because it can be used to refer to a variety of things. For instance, consider (7) as uttered by Jack and Mac. There is one sense in which their utterances “mean the same thing”—they utter the same sentence. However, there is also a sense in which their utterances do not have the same meaning. Jack is saying something true—that *he* is thirsty—while Mac is saying something false—that *he* is thirsty. David Kaplan called the first kind of meaning “linguistic meaning” or “character,” and the second sort of meaning “content.” However, making a distinction between kinds of meaning can lead us to ask the question, “What is *the* meaning of a sentence?”—a needless question, in Lewis’s opinion. Lewis prefers not to use the term ‘meaning’ at all. Instead, he introduces a neutral term, ‘semantic value.’ Lewis lists two requirements

of a semantic value. One requirement is *compositionality*—the semantic value of a sentence must be determined by the semantic values of its constituent parts.<sup>15</sup> The other requirement of semantic value is that it must play a part in determining when a sentence in a particular language such as English is true on a given occasion. Because many features of a sentence could perform these tasks, Lewis thinks that no one feature is any more deserving than any other of the title of ‘semantic’ value. When we discuss Kaplan, we will look at one kind of semantic value—what Kaplan called “contents”—but for now it will be useful to have the broader notion on hand.

### 1.3.3.2 Lewis on context dependence, index dependence, and semantic value

Now that we are familiar with the concept of semantic value, we can discuss how semantic values are sensitive features of contexts. Lewis articulates two ways in which truth can depend on contextual features: *context dependence* and *index dependence*. I will start by explaining context dependence and then turn to index dependence.

A *context*, according to Lewis, is an actual or possible concrete location made up of a possible world, a time, and a place where a sentence is uttered. Because contexts are concrete locations, they have, in Lewis’s words, “countless features.” This fact is important because, according to Lewis, the way in which English expressions are dependent on contextual features is surprisingly complex. For instance, in (7) the semantic value of the sentence clearly depends on who is speaking and when. It also matters in what world the sentence is uttered. However, it is less obvious how (9) depends on features of the context and which features it depends on. For example, it could matter whether the larger conversation involves a question about an empty fridge as opposed to questions about a global shortage of beer. It may also matter

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<sup>15</sup>Strictly speaking, Lewis requires that the constituent parts of a sentence also be sentences and not open formulas. However, I will set that issue aside for now.

whether the speaker is standing near the fridge or pointing to a map of the world. Exactly how contextual features like these affect the semantic value of sentences is a question I will address more specifically in my exposition of Kaplan's view. For now, it is enough that we have a feel for what, in Lewis's words, are the "multifarious" kinds of context dependence.

Although contexts are rich in features, there is a way in which they are limited. Because a context is a concrete location, its features cannot vary independently of one another. However, Lewis points out that truth in a language like English requires that we be able to shift one feature of the context at a time. For instance, in order to evaluate the truth of (8), we need more than the world of the original context. This is because the sentence concerns not only the way things are but also the way things might have been. In that case, we need to be able to hold features of the context other than the world fixed, and shift from the world of the context to other possible worlds. Lewis called this type of context dependence "shiftiness." In order to account for shiftiness formally, we need an  $n$ -tuple of contextual features that can vary independently of one another—an *index*, as Lewis called it. It is possible for all of the individual items of the index—the *coordinates*—to be taken from one context, but they need not be. For each context, there is an index with coordinates that are initially set to that context. Lewis calls this the *index of the context*. When evaluating a sentence in a context, we start with the index of the context and shift one feature at a time as needed. The result is an index with coordinates that do not match the features of any particular context.

What coordinates belong to the index? If index dependence is as multifarious as context dependence, then the answer is 'too many to list.' However, Lewis thinks, because there are a limited number of shifty expressions in English, the list of coordinates is quite short. In fact, he thinks most of the contextual features that are relevant to the truth of sentences are not shiftable. So whereas we have little hope

of drafting a comprehensive list of context-dependent features, we are in a better position to list all of the index-dependent features. Lewis argues that worlds should be included in the index in order to handle cases like (8). He also thinks that a time index should be added to handle cases like (10).

(10) Jack: Yesterday, Mac bought me a beer.

According to Lewis, in (10), ‘yesterday’ shifts the time of evaluation from the time of the context to an earlier time. Lewis also thinks that the index should include what he called “standards of precision” to handle cases like (11).

(11) Club owner: This bar is empty—it only has five people! I’m never going to make good on my investment.

Fire Marshal: Strictly speaking, this bar is not empty. If we had a fire drill, I would give you a fine for every person in the room.

Arguably, the club owner’s claim is true when evaluated relative to a loose standard for what counts as empty—a standard he implicitly invokes by bemoaning his potential loss of profits. However, by mentioning the fire drill, the fire marshal has made salient to the conversation a stricter standard. If we shift to this standard, the fire marshal’s statement is also true.

Lewis argues that we need both a context and an index because one cannot do the job of the other.<sup>16</sup> The features of context are not shiftable. Furthermore, no two contexts differ in only one feature, so it is no use trying to use another context as a point of evaluation when a shift is required. And indices, though essential to evaluating the shiftiness, are not rich enough to handle the countless other ways in which the truth sentences depend on contextual features. In that case, Lewis says,

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<sup>16</sup>There are those who argue that there is no need for an index, because context can provide all of the necessary relativity via an assignment function (discussed below). Lewis called proponents of this view ‘schmentencites.’ For an interesting defense of the schmentencite position, see Schaffer 2011.

sentential truth requires a relation: sentence  $s$  is true at a context  $c$  and an index  $i$ .<sup>17</sup> This relation needs to cover both the case where the coordinates of the index are set by the original context and the case where one or more of the coordinates have been shifted from the original context. In the case where the  $i$  is the index of the context, we can say: a sentence  $s$  is true iff  $s$  is true at  $c$  at the index of the context of  $c$ .<sup>18</sup>

So far, Lewis has explained why we need both a context and an index, but how do these two items, along with a grammar, compositionally determine the semantic value of sentences? Lewis argued that there are two ways in which context dependence and index dependence can determine the semantic values, and hence two ways of thinking about semantic value. The first way is to think of semantic values as “the variable but simple.” The second way is to think of semantic values as “constant but complicated.” On the simple-but-variable view, sentences and contexts together determine a semantic value that is in turn a function from indices to truth values. On the constant-but-complicated view, sentences can be assigned semantic values directly by the grammar, but these values are functions from index-context pairs to truth values. Lewis thinks of these systems as interchangeable, but others have opted for one or the other. For instance, Kaplan’s view, to which we will now turn, is a version of the simple-but-variable approach.

### 1.3.3.3 Kaplan on the simple but variable approach

In Kaplan’s view, sentences together with contexts determine *contents*, which are functions from *circumstances of evaluation* to truth values. To see how contexts and circumstances of evaluation work in Kaplan’s system to determine the truth of sentences, we can begin with the role of context in determining content.

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<sup>17</sup>Lewis, 1980, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup>Lewis, 1980, p. 31.

Before I begin, it will be useful to note the way in which Kaplan’s idea of context differs from Lewis’s. In Kaplan’s view, a context is an ordered  $n$ -tuple of contextual features rather than a concrete location. If we take contexts to be concrete locations, we will never have to worry that a context is “rich enough” to handle all of the possible context-dependent expressions. However, if we think of contexts as formal objects, we must be sure that we have added enough items to our list to capture every kind of context dependency. Kaplan thought that, at the very least, each context is associated with an agent, a location, a possible world, and a time.

The first way in which context plays a role in determining the truth values of sentences is by helping to determine what Kaplan called the *content* of a sentence. The contents of singular terms with respect to contexts are individuals. The content of a predicate like ‘tasty’ with respect to contexts is properties or relations. Kaplan thought of the contents of sentences with respect to contexts as *propositions*. In his view, propositions are structured entities that can contain things like properties, relations, and individuals as constituents. For instance, in (12), the content of the sentence Mac utters with respect to the context of his utterance is the structured proposition  $\langle \text{Jack, being-thirsty} \rangle$ .<sup>19</sup>

(12) Jack is thirsty.

On Kaplan’s view, a proposition is what is asserted at a context, and it is also what is believed by a person asserting a sentence. Although the character of a sentence, on Kaplan’s view, is the meaning of a sentence in one sense of meaning, the linguistic meaning, it is not the object of belief or assertion. Lewis wondered whether propositions in Kaplan’s sense could play the right role in assertion and belief. He argues that although propositions in Kaplan’s sense are well-suited to be the compositional

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<sup>19</sup>Strictly speaking, Kaplan’s system does not assign contents to utterances, which are particular speech acts, but to occurrences, which are context-expression pairs. For ease of exposition, I will set aside this complexity for now. I will return to the issue of utterance truth in chapter 2.

semantic values of sentences, they cannot be the things asserted and believed.<sup>20</sup> On Kaplan's view, a single proposition is expressed by an utterance in a context. Alternative views suggest that a plurality of propositions are expressed by a single utterance.<sup>21</sup>

According to Kaplan, expressions are not assigned contents directly. Rather, each expression is associated with a *character*, which is a function from contexts to contents. The contents of some expressions are the same at every context, while the contents of others vary from context to context. Classic examples of the latter are indexical expressions such as 'I.' Contrast (12) with (7). In (12), once the referent of 'Jack' has been fixed, it will pick out the same individual in every context: Jack. However, in (7), 'I' will not always pick out the same individual because it has no fixed content. Rather, 'I' is associated with a function from contexts to contents—a function that always delivers the speaker of the context. So while the character of 'Jack is thirsty' delivers the same proposition, namely  $\langle \text{Jack, being-thirsty} \rangle$ , regardless of whether Jack or Mac is the speaker, the character of 'I am thirsty' delivers the proposition  $\langle \text{Jack, being-thirsty} \rangle$  when uttered by Jack, but  $\langle \text{Mac, being-thirsty} \rangle$  when uttered by Mac. Demonstrative expressions such as 'that' are similar to 'I' in the sense that their referents are contextually variant. However, the situation is more complicated with these kinds of terms because items such as the speaker's gestures—or, in other views, the speaker's intentions—play a role in fixing reference.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>See Lewis (1980) for an important discussion about propositions as the objects of belief.

<sup>21</sup>For instance, see Cappelen and Lepore, 1997 and 2005.

<sup>22</sup>The correct semantic treatment of demonstratives is a large and controversial issue that I am obviously oversimplifying here. Kaplan himself offered two separate treatments of demonstratives such as 'that': one in his (1989b) paper and one in his (1989a) paper.



Expressions such as ‘I’ or ‘that’ are two obvious examples of context-sensitive expressions, but there are other, less obvious examples as well.<sup>23</sup> Again, consider (9). As we have seen when discussing Lewis, quantifiers like ‘all’ are sensitive to contextual features such as location, previous remarks, speaker intentions, and so on. But how do these contextual features affect content? Several semantic treatments are available for quantifiers such as ‘all’ that are compatible with Kaplan’s system. One option is to say that there is an implicit restriction on the domain of quantification. In this view, even though the surface grammar does not specify a domain, the logical form of the sentence contains a *hidden indexical* that refers to the domain. A similar option for handling covert context sensitivity is to appeal to *hidden variables* as opposed to hidden indexicals. On this view, ‘all’ is invariant in reference but contains an argument place for a variable—a variable that is either syntactically triggered or present in an enriched logical form—that must be saturated by the context. For sentences containing terms with either implicit or explicit variables that must be contextually satisfied, an *assignment function* is required to assign values to the variables.

However, the contents of sentences are not associated with a truth value directly, because propositions can be evaluated for truth and falsity at worlds and times other than the world and time of the context. In other words, propositional truth is *relative* on Kaplan’s view. In order to capture relativity, Kaplan employs *circumstances of evaluation*. Circumstances of evaluation—thought of as sequences of parameters—are functionally equivalent to Lewis’s indices, though Kaplan and Lewis differ as to what ought to be included in the index. For Kaplan, the circumstance of evaluation contains at least a world, but in principle, there is room for other parameters as

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<sup>23</sup>Many more kinds of context sensitivity exist than the ones I have mentioned here. For instance, in addition to indexicals and demonstratives, Partee (2004) mentions vague and scalar predicates, “hedges,” standards of precision (discussed below), and “implicit coming and going of relevant alternatives.”

well. Kaplan considered adding a time parameter in addition to a world parameter to account for tense operators, making the circumstance a world-time pair  $\langle w, t \rangle$ . On this view, propositions do not contain a time as a constituent but are “temporally neutral” in the sense that they cannot be evaluated for truth or falsity until a time of evaluation has been set. As we will see in section (1.5.2), the alternative to having a time parameter is to have time enter into the content. In that case, the content of (12) in 2012 would be the time-specific proposition  $\langle \text{Jack, being-thirsty, 2012} \rangle$ . This proposition is then evaluated relative to a circumstance of evaluation that does not contain a time parameter.<sup>24</sup>

The parameters of the circumstance of evaluation can be set by the world and time of the context, but they can also be shifted to other worlds and times. It is important to see that, unlike indexicality, the circumstance of evaluation does not help determine content. Rather, it helps determine the truth of a sentence by providing a salient point for the evaluation of the content.<sup>25</sup> Because Kaplan’s circumstance of evaluation and Lewis’s index are functionally equivalent, I’ll take these terms to be interchangeable in what follows.

We are now in a position to see how sentences are assigned truth values on Kaplan’s system. As with Lewis’s system, context comes into play at two separate points. It determines content, and it also provides the initial settings for the parameters of the circumstance of evaluation. In Kaplan’s view, sentences are assigned contents relative to contexts. The content of some sentences will be the same at every context, while the content of sentences containing context-sensitive expressions will vary from context to context. These contents—propositions—are then evaluated relative to a

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<sup>24</sup>In his 2011 manuscript, Schaffer examines whether sufficient justification exists for including a world or time parameter in the index. He argues for a thesis he calls “parallelism,” which claims that the arguments for or against adding or precluding a time parameter will also apply to adding or precluding a world parameter and vice versa.

<sup>25</sup>MacFarlane (2009b) argues that the term ‘context sensitivity’ should be taken to include ‘index sensitivity’ in this sense.

circumstance of evaluation, which on Kaplan's view is a function from worlds or world-time pairs to truth values. The parameters of the circumstance can be set to the world and time of the context, but they can also be shifted to other worlds and times as needed to accommodate modal and temporal operators.

## 1.4 Contextualism

So far, we have seen that the truth value for a sentence is assigned relative to a context  $c$ , an index  $i$  (usually a world), and an assignment function  $a$ . So where does perspectival information such as a standard of taste fit into this framework? In what way does truth depend on a standard of taste? I will look at simplified versions of two semantic accounts that aim to answer these questions: contextualism and relativism. I will reiterate some criticisms for each account that can be found in the current literature on the debate about perspectival expressions, as well as formulate some criticisms of my own. As I do so, the need to look to more sophisticated versions of these accounts, and to offer more subtle treatments of the disagreement data, should become clear.

One suggestion for how truth can depend on a standard of taste is that predicates of personal taste contribute to the truth of a sentence in the way that other context-dependent expressions (such as indexicals) do, i.e., by helping to determine what proposition is expressed in a given context. This view, called *contextualism*, says that the propositions expressed by utterances involving predicates of personal taste “contain” a particular standard of taste or a body of evidence.

**Contextualism:** the view that the content of sentences containing perspectival information, including predicates of personal taste, is at least partially determined by that information.

In current philosophical and linguistic literature, there are a variety of theories that go by the name ‘contextualism.’ The theory I refer to here as ‘contextualism’ is a theory

about the semantics of perspectival expressions. This use should be distinguished from a broader use of ‘contextualism,’ which is a general thesis about the role of context dependence in a language. The broader use of ‘contextualism’ includes the treatments of the context-sensitive terms discussed in 1.3.3.<sup>26</sup>

Contextualism contrasts with *semantic minimalism* for taste predicates, which says that the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence such as ‘Budweiser is tasty’ does not include anyone’s standard of taste. Rather, the proposition [Budweiser is tasty] mirrors the surface grammar and does not contain any perspectival information, even implicitly. ‘Semantic minimalism’ also has a broader and more narrow use. Semantic minimalism in the broad sense is opposed to contextualism in the broad sense.<sup>27</sup>

#### 1.4.1 Whose tastes are relevant in contextualism?

Context determines whose standard of taste or body of evidence is to be included in the proposition. For now, we will assume that the relevant context is the context of utterance and that context always selects the speaker as the individual whose tastes are relevant to determining content. We can call the kind of contextualism that makes these assumptions *baseline contextualism*. We will see shortly that the assumptions of baseline contextualism can be given up. In chapter 3, I will examine a more sophisticated version of contextualism presented by Jonathan Schaffer, which he calls *meaning perspectivalism*. Even though more robust versions of contextualism are available, it is useful to start with the simplest version, if for no other reason than the fact that relativists often focus on the simple version when critiquing contextualism.

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<sup>26</sup>For discussions of contextualism see Cappelen and Lepore, (2005), as well as Recanati (2005).

<sup>27</sup>Again, for discussion of semantic minimalism, see Cappelen and Lepore (2005), as well as Recanati (2005).

### 1.4.2 Two ways of representing tastes in the proposition

There are at least two options for how to include tastes in the proposition: *indexicalism* and *variabilism*.<sup>28</sup> According to indexicalists, propositions expressed by perspectival sentences contain covert indexical elements just like sentences containing ‘I’ or ‘now.’ A predicate of personal taste affects the truth value of a sentence containing it because the extension of such a predicate varies with context. Given the assumption of compositionality, the proposition expressed also varies with the context. If we assume that the relevant context is the context of utterance and that the relevant standard of taste is the speaker’s standard, then the proposition Ed expresses in (105) is something such as [Budweiser is tasty<sub>Ed</sub>]. Here the extension of ‘tasty’ is the set of things that taste good to Ed. Meanwhile, the proposition I expressed is something such as [Budweiser is not tasty<sub>Heidi</sub>], where the extension of ‘tasty’ is the set of things that taste good according to my standard of taste.

Unlike indexicalism, variabilism does not claim that the intension of predicates such as ‘tasty’ varies with context. Instead, Variabilists contend that ‘tasty’ contains a *hidden variable* which is not apparent in the surface grammar. The model for variablism about taste is expressions such as ‘local’ rather than expressions such as ‘I.’ variablism about ‘local’ says that the expression is, in a sense, “incomplete” until it is “filled in” by the context. Furthermore, it can be completed differently at different contexts. Thus, variabilism about taste says that Ed’s claim contains a covert argument place, which is saturated by context to give us something such as [Budweiser tastes good to Ed]. *Syntactic variabilism* holds that this hidden variable appears at the syntactic level, while *semantic variabilism* says that this variable, though absent in the syntax, is filled in at the semantic level via the process of ‘free enrichment.’

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<sup>28</sup>Here my terminology and presentation closely follow an early version of Schaffer (2009). Schaffer has since changed his terminology and distinguishes between ‘indexical’ and ‘relational’ terms.

Both indexicalists and variabilists have the option of claiming that individuals or contexts exist, other than the speaker and the context of utterance, that are relevant to determining content. Ed could be referring to the standard of a contextually salient individual other than the speaker. Or he could be referring to the standards of a contextually salient group—a group that may or may not include the speaker. It could also be that these standards are drawn from a context other than the context of utterance. According to a contextualist view that MacFarlane somewhat misleadingly labels “indexical relativism,” the contextualist could turn to the *context of assessment* to establish the denotation of perspectival expressions. According to MacFarlane, the context of assessment is an actual or possible context where an *assessor* assesses the truth of someone’s claim. If the context of assessment is relevant to determining content, then Ed’s utterance will not be associated with a single proposition but with different propositions at different contexts of assessment.

### 1.4.3 The problem of disagreement for baseline contextualism

Though it is natural to think that predicates of personal taste somehow include information about what tastes good to the speaker, this suggestion leaves us wondering how we can make sense of what appeared to be a disagreement between Ed and Jim in (105). We can call this problem for contextualism *the Problem of Talking Past*. The Problem of Talking Past is this: though syntactically Jim’s claim is the negation of Ed’s, it is clear that, from the contextualist’s standpoint, our claims do not express contradictory contents. However, if Jim and Ed are just uttering different but compatible claims, then what could be the purpose of their disagreement? And perhaps more worrisome, if you think that contradictory contents are necessary for any real sort of disagreement, then Ed and Jim are not even having a disagreement. But if Ed and Jim are not really disagreeing, then Jim’s use of ‘no’ is puzzling. If Ed is merely expressing a proposition about his own preference for Bud, then why

should Jim bother contradicting him? It would be one thing if Jim thought Ed were lying about his taste in beer to impress a cute bartender. In that case, Jim could respond by saying ‘no,’ meaning [Budweiser isn’t tasty<sub>Ed</sub>] or [Budweiser isn’t tasty to Ed]. However, as things stand (unfortunately for Ed), Budweiser really does taste good to him, in which case Jim’s response seems out of place.

Even more puzzling for the contextualist are cases in which the person denying a claim says something stronger than “No.” Call these cases of *strong denial*.

(13) Max: Liverwurst is tasty.

Luke: That’s not true! Liverwurst is not remotely tasty.

(14) Max: Liverwurst is tasty.

Luke: That’s false! Liverwurst is not remotely tasty.

In both (13) and (14), Luke seems to be explicitly commenting on the *truth* of Max’s claim. But how can this be if Max is merely reporting on his own taste perspective?

#### 1.4.3.1 Retraction

A phenomenon called *retraction* adds to the problem of disagreement for contextualism.<sup>29</sup> In (32), two classmates meet for lunch after one of them has returned from studying abroad:

(15) Joe: Gross. I can’t believe you’re eating sushi!

Laura: But it’s so tasty.

Joe: No it isn’t, it tastes terrible! In fact, you said so yourself before you left for Japan.

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<sup>29</sup>Though retraction is cited in arguments against contextualism for certain kinds of perspectival expressions, epistemic modals for example, it is far less common to appeal to retraction for predicates of personal taste. Some philosophers and linguists—Stephenson, 2007, for example—even deny the possibility of retraction in taste disagreements. Philosophers who recognize cases of retraction, though, may or may not agree that it causes difficulties for contextualism. See Schaffer, 2009 and Egan, 2010.

Laura: I did? Well, then, I was wrong.

Just as there are cases of strong denial, such as cases involving ‘that’s false,’ there might also be cases of *strong retraction* such as (16), where the person retracting says something stronger than ‘I was wrong.’

(16) Joe: Gross. I can’t believe you’re eating sushi!

Laura: But it’s so tasty.

Joe: No it isn’t, it tastes terrible! In fact, you said so yourself before you left for Japan.

Laura: I did? Well, what I said is false.

Both (32) and (16) are puzzling when it comes to contextualism. If Laura’s original statement merely expresses her tastes at the time of utterance, then why should she retract her claim when her tastes change? After all, the fact that she has learned to like sushi does not change the fact that she disliked it in the past. In that case, it seems that by ‘I was wrong’ or ‘what I said is false’ Laura cannot mean that her original statement did not reflect her tastes at the time she made the statement.

Making further trouble for contextualism is the fact that it seems possible to get cases such as (17), where the reacting individual has not changed with regard to how the item tastes to him or her.<sup>30</sup>

(17) Undergraduate: Boone’s Farm is tasty!

Wine connoisseur: That’s not true! Boone’s Farm isn’t tasty.

Undergraduate: Really? Then I guess I was wrong.

Again, if all the undergraduate meant to say was that Boone’s Farm was tasty to him, then it seems puzzling that he would retract upon hearing that the connoisseur

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<sup>30</sup>Schaffer, 2009 also uses connoisseur cases, though he uses them to make a point about substantive disagreement.



disagrees with him, especially considering that the connoisseur's remark does not change the fact that Boone's Farm still tastes good to him.

#### 1.4.3.2 Eavesdropping

Another phenomenon related to disagreement, dubbed *eavesdropping*, poses a special problem for contextualist theories that appeal to the perspective of the group. Andy Egan notices that eavesdroppers sometimes make comments on what they overhear based on what things are like from their own perspective.<sup>31</sup> In (62) Max and Luke listen outside the kitchen as Grandma talks on the phone about what food she is making the boys for lunch.

(18) Grandma: I'm going to make liverwurst sandwiches because liverwurst is so tasty.

Luke: Maybe we should go in. Grandma says liverwurst is tasty.

Max: Believe me, that's false! Liverwurst is not tasty.

Even if Grandma's use of 'tasty' denotes the standards of a contextually relevant group, Max's comment is out of place, because he is not technically a participant in the conversation. Barring moves to include Max and Luke as conversational participants, the contextualist could turn to the context in which Max assesses the truth of Grandma's claim—the context of assessment—to establish the denotation of 'tasty.' However, in this case it seems strange that the proposition Grandma expresses depends not on her own standard, nor on the standards of the intended addressees of her claim, but on the standards of people who merely happen to overhear her claim.

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<sup>31</sup>Egan, 2005.

#### 1.4.4 Going beyond the speaker

Some general semantic moves are available to the contextualist. As I mentioned above, contextualists are not necessarily committed to saying that the context of utterance designates the speaker's standard of taste as relevant to determining the extension for 'tasty.' Nor are they even committed to the context of utterance as relevant to determining content. Could this flexibility help the contextualist handle disagreements such as (105)? For instance, could Ed have just been saying that Budweiser is tasty to Jim? If so, then it makes sense that Jim should say 'no' in response. Or perhaps Ed meant to refer to the taste standards of some contextually salient group. If Jim were a member of such a group, then it is understandable that he should respond negatively to Ed's claims.

Unfortunately, as John MacFarlane points out, though these moves may help us understand why I would protest my interlocutor's claims, they leave us wondering why they made those claims in the first place.<sup>32</sup> Assuming that Ed knew that I did not like Budweiser—a preference I have often voiced—then why would he say that I did? If Ed knew that there was some chance that someone within the group did not care for American ale, then why would Ed claim that Budweiser is tasty to everyone in the group? Furthermore, you might think that Ed would be violating some norm of assertion if he uttered things he knew to be false. So unless Ed was completely unaware that some people do not like Budweiser (a fact that is difficult to believe), Ed's assertion appears to be altogether unwarranted. If the contextualist must purchase a solution to disagreement at the cost of warranted assertion, then the adoption of contextualism comes at a high price.

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<sup>32</sup>See MacFarlane, 2009a for a discussion of what he calls "semi-solipsistic contextualism."

## 1.5 Relativism

Relativists have argued that contextualism cannot make sense of faultless disagreement and that this failure necessitates the move to a more radical semantics. Many relativists take these alleged shortcomings to be the most important motivation for relativism. For instance, John MacFarlane writes,

The relativist's central objection to contextualism is that it fails to account for the possibility of disagreement in subjective discourse—for our sense, that when I say that carrots are delicious and you deny this, we are genuinely disagreeing with each other, and not making compatible claims about our respective tastes.<sup>33</sup>

According to relativism about taste, utterances of sentences involving predicates such as 'tasty' express propositions that are contextually invariant with regard to taste. These propositions are assigned truth values relative to a *taste parameter* in addition to a world parameter and perhaps a time parameter. In sections (1.5.1)-(1.5.4), we will look at one common version of relativism—which I will call *baseline relativism*—to see whether it can fare better than contextualism at making sense of faultless disagreement. In chapter 2, I will examine two more sophisticated versions of relativism: a version of what I will call *hybrid relativism* presented by Stephenson, and a version of what has been called *radical relativism* advocated for by MacFarlane. However, because relativism already represents a departure from the familiar semantic framework, we should begin with the simplest version of the view to see if it can capture faultless disagreement before moving on to more complicated solutions.

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<sup>33</sup>Macfarlane, 2007, p. 2.

### 1.5.1 Extending Kaplan and Lewis’s semantic framework

In examining contextualism, we have considered one kind of context sensitivity—the kind that affects the content of an expression. Let us call this kind of context sensitivity ‘broadly indexical context sensitivity.’ Following Macfarlane, we can say that an expression is *broadly indexical* if and only if its content depends on features of the context.<sup>34</sup> As we have seen, a contextualist theory of perspectival expressions claims that they are broadly indexical—that they affect the truth of a sentence containing them by affecting what proposition gets expressed by that sentence in a context. However, relativists argue that there is another way for perspectival expressions to affect the truth of sentences containing them. Some relativists claim that context sensitivity should be construed more broadly to include certain kinds of dependence of extension on features of the context.<sup>35</sup>

As we will see, defining relativism is a controversial matter. For now, I am going to characterize relativism by separating it from contextualism.<sup>36</sup> At the very least, we can think of relativism as a view for which sentences containing perspectival expressions can vary in truth value without varying in content. This characterization is a little too broad because it counts a view that allows for world relativity (*contingency*) as a type of relativism. In this characterization, anyone doing possible-world semantics would count as a relativist. Because I am interested in propositions (or utterances) whose truth can vary even within a world, I will stipulate the following:

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<sup>34</sup>My terminology is adapted from MacFarlane, 2007. While MacFarlane uses the term ‘indexical’ to fit this definition, I prefer to use ‘broadly indexical’ so as to indicate that there is more than one way for the content of an expression to depend on features of the context. Both variabilism and indexicalism are ways of claiming that expressions are broadly indexical.

<sup>35</sup>For instance, see MacFarlane, 2007.

<sup>36</sup>Schaffer, 2009, argues that setting up the debate about perspectival expressions by contrasting relativism and contextualism is unhelpful because certain versions of these theories are compatible with one another. I will continue to follow orthodoxy in making this contrast while noting that it is perhaps not the optimal way of framing the debate.

**Relativism:** the view that the content of sentences containing perspectival expressions (including predicates of personal taste) is true or false relative to some factor(s) in addition to a context of utterance and a possible world.

Relativism then contrasts with absolutism about taste.

**Absolutism:** the view that the content of sentences containing perspectival expressions (including predicates of personal taste) are true or false only relative to worlds.

These characterizations count both contextualism and semantic minimalism about taste predicates as types of absolutism. Also, these characterizations count *temporalism*—the view that propositions have truth values relative to times in addition to worlds—as a kind of relativism. Although temporalism is not normally considered a relativist view, it provides a template for one kind of relativism about predicates of personal taste. Although I will technically count temporalism as a kind of relativism, from here on out I am going to use ‘relativism’ to refer to relativism about perspectival expressions, including predicates of personal taste. Though it may appear somewhat arbitrary, this characterization is fitting because we are interested in the dependence of an extension of an expression on perspectival information.

Setting up relativism in opposition to contextualism is a somewhat misleading way to characterize the debate, because these two positions are not entirely incompatible with one another given the way I have defined them.<sup>37</sup> Relativism for perspectival expressions is opposed to contextualism as defined in section 1.4 only in regard to the role perspectival expressions play in determining truth values for sentences. Contextualism claims that perspectival information affects the truth of a sentence only by determining content, while relativism claims that perspectival information may also play a role in determining the truth of a proposition once content has been fixed.

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<sup>37</sup>This point was brought to my attention by reading Schaffer (2009) which provides a more helpful taxonomy of the views.

However, in other respects, contextualism and relativism are not incompatible with one another. This way of characterizing the debate about perspectival expressions such as ‘tasty’ allows for a variety of interesting combinations of the positions. For instance, one could be a contextualist about expressions such as ‘all’ and still be a relativist about perspectival expressions such as predicates of personal taste. More interestingly, one could adopt a contextualism about perspectival expressions and still count as a relativist so long as the content of these sentences is evaluated relative to some factor in addition to worlds. For instance, one could argue that terms such as ‘tasty’ contain contextually supplied degree arguments but still insist that the contents of sentences containing ‘tasty’ must be evaluated relative to a perspective.<sup>38</sup>

A significant part of the literature on relativism is taken up by disputes over what views deserve the label “relativism.” I will divide relativism into three main types: baseline, hybrid, and radical.<sup>39</sup> In the following sections, I will concentrate on baseline relativism, investigating how it fares with regard to disagreement. Later on, I will explore two more complex versions of relativism: a radical version of relativism advocated for by Macfarlane and a semi-relativistic account adopted by Stephenson.

### 1.5.2 Baseline relativism

Like contextualists, baseline relativists make use of a three-place sentential truth predicate  $S(c, i, a)$  containing a context, an index, and an assignment function. However, the baseline relativist adds an extra parameter to the circumstance of evaluation to handle perspectival information.

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<sup>38</sup>Here again, I want credit to Schaffer, 2009, for drawing my attention to this sort of combinatorial view.

<sup>39</sup>This division is purely for the purposes of exposition. See Recanati, 2007, and Kölbel, 2008. Both have other ways of dividing relativism. Note that my terminology differs from Recanati’s, and that I divide the views somewhat differently than either Recanati or Kölbel.

A familiar model for baseline relativism is temporalism.<sup>40</sup> According to temporalism, tensed sentences do not vary in truth value by expressing different propositions at different times of utterance. Rather, temporalists maintain that a tensed sentence expresses the same proposition whenever it is uttered but that this proposition has different truth values at different times.

Baseline relativism says something similar about sentences containing perspectival expressions, such as predicates of personal taste. Baseline relativists claim that taste sentences express the same proposition at every context in which they are uttered but that the truth of these propositions is relative to a parameter that represents something like an individual's taste perspective in addition to a world and perhaps a time.<sup>41</sup> Most often, this parameter is represented as an individual  $i$  or judge  $j$ , though it can sometimes represent something more abstract, such as a standard of taste.<sup>42</sup> For baseline relativists who make use of such a 'perspectival parameter,' propositions are something like functions from world-time-judge triples  $\langle w, t, j \rangle$  (or *centered worlds*) to truth values. In other words, in baseline relativism for predicates of personal taste, propositional truth is relative to an individual, that is, relative to her tastes.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>See Richard (2003) for a brief introduction to temporalism.

<sup>41</sup>For those who reserve the label "proposition" for functions from worlds to truth values (or for sets of worlds), contents that are standard-neutral or time-neutral will not count as propositions in the classical sense. Rather, such items are thought to be *sub-propositional*. Part of the reason for this hesitation can be traced to the idea that propositions are the objects of belief and assertion. The worry is that contents with non-standard parameters will not be able to play this role. I will continue to use "proposition" or "centered proposition" to apply to contents with non-standard parameters, while noting that those who argue for such contents have the burden of explaining the relationship these contents bear to belief and assertion.

<sup>42</sup>Egan, 2007b, uses  $i$ ; Stephenson, 2007 and Lasersohn, 2009 both use  $j$ . MacFarlane, 2007 describes a baseline relativism about 'know' that uses  $e$ , and MacFarlane, 2009a argues for a radical relativism for epistemic modals that makes use of an epistemic standards parameter  $i$ .

<sup>43</sup>It is an open question whether we need a separate parameter to represent each of the various kinds of perspectival information, or whether we could get by with a single catch-all parameter. Whether you think we need, for instance, a parameter to represent standards of taste in addition to epistemic states will depend on your motivation for accepting parameters in the first place. If,

### 1.5.2.1 Who is the judge according to baseline relativism?

Again, on Kaplan’s view, it is the job of the context to determine what content is expressed by a sentence in that context. Following MacFarlane, I will call this the *content determinative role*. But contexts have another job; they determine which circumstance of evaluation is relevant for evaluating the truth of the proposition expressed. Using MacFarlane’s terminology, we can call this the *circumstance determinative role*. Kaplan often refers to the ‘circumstance of the context.’ He gives the following definition of the truth of an occurrence of a sentence with respect to the circumstance of the context:<sup>45</sup>

If  $c$  is a context, an occurrence of  $\phi$  in  $c$  is true iff the content expressed by  $\phi$  in this context is true when evaluated with respect to the circumstance of the context.

As we have seen, on the standard view, the ‘circumstance of the context’ is usually taken to be the circumstance determined by the *context of utterance*. Most baseline relativists also think that the context of utterance fixes the relevant circumstance of evaluation, including the judge parameter.<sup>46</sup> There are many people at the context of utterance whom the moderate relativist could specify as being the judge of the context. Usually, the judge of the context of utterance is taken to be the speaker, but there is room in some accounts for the judge to be an other individual or group of individuals. There is also room for a plural judge. For instance, the judge of the context could be the group of conversational participants.

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like Lewis, you think that parameters (indices) require operators to shift, then you will recognize only as many parameters as there are shifty operators in the language. However, you might think, as MacFarlane does, that as long as there is sufficient semantic payoff for adding parameters, we are justified in adding them.<sup>44</sup> The benefit of having separate parameters is, of course, that they can shift independently of one another—something that is not possible if the parameters are ‘fused together’ into a single parameter.

<sup>45</sup>Kaplan, 1989b.

<sup>46</sup>MacFarlane, 2007 refers to any view that adds a perspectival parameter and takes this parameter to be initiated by the context of utterance as “nonindexical contextualism.”



Moderate relativists may adopt a principle about utterance correctness that says that an utterance is correctly asserted or assessed when it is asserted or assessed from the perspective of an individual (such as the speaker or the conversational group) at the context of utterance. Although Kaplan limited talk of utterances to a theory of speech acts, let us assume that an utterance of a sentence at a context is true as long as an occurrence of that sentence is true at that context. This so-called ‘bridge principle,’ together with Kaplan’s definition of the truth of the occurrence of a sentence  $S$  at a context  $c$ , gives us a definition of utterance truth.

An **utterance** of  $S$  at  $c$  is true iff the proposition expressed by  $S$  at  $c$  is true at the circumstance of  $c$ .<sup>47</sup>

Since, on baseline relativism, the circumstance includes a judge, an utterance of  $S$  is true iff the proposition expressed by  $S$  at the context of utterance is true relative to the judge at the context of utterance. If the judge of the context of utterance is the speaker, then, in order to speak truly, speakers ought to make assertions based on what things are like from their perspective at the context of utterance. We can follow Kölbel, 2008, and label this sort of view of utterance truth a *moderate pragmatics*.

### 1.5.3 Contradictory contents and faultlessness

Adding a judge parameter to the circumstance of evaluation gives moderate relativists a way for the participants in a perspectival disagreement to utter contradictory contents while both are saying something true. Usually, moderate relativists specify that the judge of the context is always the speaker. In that case, a sentence containing a predicate of personal taste or epistemic modals expresses a proposition that can vary in truth depending on who utters it. If the same proposition can have different truth values when uttered by different speakers, then we might be able to better explain the disagreement between Ed and Jim in (105). Either Ed or Jim can act as

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<sup>47</sup>This definition is taken from MacFarlane, 2007.

the judge of what is tasty. When Ed claims that Budweiser is tasty, he is asserting a proposition that is true relative to his tastes at the time of utterance. When Jim says that Budweiser isn't tasty, he is asserting a proposition that is true relative to what his tastes are at the time of utterance. Although Ed and Jim uttered sentences with contradictory contents, each of the contents is true with regard to the circumstance determined by the context in which each sentence is uttered.

#### 1.5.4 The problem of disagreement for baseline relativism

Although relativism captures many of our initial intuitions about taste disagreements, it leaves us with something of a puzzle. Call this puzzle *the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement*.<sup>48</sup> The problem is this: if truth is relative to a taste perspective, then why is it appropriate for me to contradict Ed, given that we occupy different taste perspectives? To feel the pull of the puzzle, consider how inappropriate it would be for two people who occupied different worlds to argue about what the world is like. In (19), Bittman lives in the actual world and Bittman\* lives in another possible world where the moon is made of green cheese. Assume (per impossibile) that Bittman and Bittman\* could communicate across worlds.<sup>49</sup>

(19) Mark Bittman: The moon is not made of green cheese.

Mark Bittman\*: # No, the moon is made of green cheese.

Likewise, if truth is relative to times, then consider how inappropriate it would be for people who occupy different times to argue about what the world is like at a given time.<sup>50</sup> Imagine that Julia leaves a message on James's answering machine on

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<sup>48</sup>A number of philosophers have discussed variations on this problem, among them; Dreier, 2009; Einheuser, 2008; MacFarlane, 2007; and Schaffer, 2009.

<sup>49</sup>Of course, there are other complications for this kind of example besides the impossibility of cross-world communication. For instance, we would have to assume that the referent for 'the moon' is the same in both worlds.

<sup>50</sup>You may not agree with the temporalist view that truth is relative to times. Instead you might argue, as eternalists do, that sentences containing temporal expressions are "context-sensitive" in the

Tuesday, letting him know that her book was released that day. James replies after listening to her message on Wednesday.

(20) Julia Child [on Tuesday]: *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* was released today.

James Beard [on Wednesday]: # That's not true. *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* wasn't released today. It was released yesterday.

It would be even more inappropriate if Julia retracted her claim after hearing James's assertion.

(21) Julia Child [on Tuesday]: *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* was released today.

James Beard [on Wednesday]: # That's not true. *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* wasn't released today. It was released yesterday.

Julia: [on Wednesday]: # Oh, I see. Well, then, I was wrong.

And it would be just as inappropriate if an eavesdropper like Paula were to comment after having listened to an old recording of the conversation.

(22) Julia Child [on May 7, 1961]: *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* was released today.

James Beard [on May 8, 1961]: # That's not true. *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* wasn't released today. It was released yesterday.

Paula Deen [on May 8, 2012] # They are both wrong! That book was released ages ago.

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sense that the proposition expressed by sentences containing temporal expressions varies depending on the time of utterance. If eternalism is true, then inter-temporal disagreement is inappropriate for different reasons. For an introduction to the issue of temporalism vs. eternalism see, Richard (2003).

If it would be inappropriate for two people to argue about the way the world is when they occupy different worlds, and it would be inappropriate for two people to argue about the way the world is at a time when they occupy different times, how can it be appropriate for two people to argue about the way something tastes when they occupy different taste perspectives? Until the relativist can explain why disagreements about taste are different from other cases of cross-perspectival disagreement, she cannot claim to have the advantage over contextualists in explaining disagreement.

## 1.6 Faultlessness

It seems clear that relativists have acted too quickly in arguing that faultless disagreement justifies the move to relativism. Contrary to first appearances, taste disagreements pose challenges to contextualism and relativism alike. Until these challenges are addressed, contextualism and relativism will remain in a standoff with regard to disagreement. In chapters 2 and 3, I will examine possible solutions to both the Problem of Talking Past and the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement that are based on more sophisticated versions of relativism and contextualism. However, before moving on to these solutions, it is important to point out some difficulties surrounding the notion of faultlessness itself.

In explaining the puzzle of faultless disagreement in the previous sections, I proceeded as if the notion of faultlessness were entirely straightforward. My exposition of the puzzle mirrored the way it is often presented in the current literature—where faultlessness is loosely and casually defined, if it is defined at all. However, relying on an intuitive notion of faultlessness leaves it unclear exactly what phenomenon we are trying to capture with a semantic theory. In that case, it becomes important for us to ask, “What does it mean for a disagreement to be faultless?” This question has become central to the debate on the semantics of taste, and yet I will argue that it is difficult to answer without biasing the debate in favor of a particular semantic

theory. The term “faultless disagreement” was popularized by Kölbel, who defines it as follows:

A faultless disagreement is a situation where there is a thinker *A*, a thinker *B*, and a proposition (content of judgment) *p*, such that:

(a) *A* believes (judges) that *p*, and *B* believes (judges) that not-*p*.

(b) Neither *A* nor *B* has made a mistake (is at fault).<sup>51</sup>

However, Kölbel’s definition is problematic in at least two respects. First, Kölbel moves too quickly from the observation that *A* and *B*’s claims appear incompatible to the conclusion that the contents of their claims are contradictory. We are entitled to conclude from examples like (105) that *A*’s claim syntactically contradicts *B*’s claim, but we cannot assume from this conclusion that they semantically contradict one another in the sense of having contradictory contents.<sup>52</sup> Nor can we assume that the contents of *A* and *B*’s beliefs are the same as the contents of their utterances. Because the debate over the semantics of taste is in part a debate about how to represent semantically the content of these expressions, it is important for us to retain neutrality with respect to content. If we build certain assumptions about content into our definition of faultlessness, we run the risk of begging the question against particular semantic solutions. For instance, as it stands, Kölbel’s definition

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<sup>51</sup>Kölbel, 2004, p. 53.

<sup>52</sup>Although Kölbel’s definition does not have this problem, we should also be careful not to require that faultless disagreement involves syntactic negation. Arguably, there could be cases of disagreement that do not involve syntactic negation, and hence there could be causes of faultless disagreement that do not involve syntactic negation. For instance, consider (1):

(1) Mac: Iced coffee is delicious.

Wendy: Are you crazy? Iced coffee is disgusting!

It seems clear that (1) generates the intuition of faultlessness as much as (105), even though Wendy’s claim does not syntactically negate Mac’s. As we will see in section 1.4.3, disagreements that involve syntactic negation pose a special challenge for certain semantic approaches because they necessitate an explanation of what is being negated. However, our initial characterization of faultless disagreement ought to allow the term to apply to a wide variety of constructions.

biases the debate against versions of contextualism that claim that the content of *A*'s claim and the content of *B*'s claim are not incompatible with one another, because such accounts will not be able to capture disagreement as it is defined.

The second problem with Kölbel's definition is that it does not specify what it means to say that "Neither *A* nor *B* has made a mistake (is at fault)." In truth, the problem is not that his definition fails to identify the kind of fault that is at issue—retaining neutrality in this respect is actually a positive feature of an *initial* characterization of faultless disagreement (though, of course, a more robust characterization requires greater specificity). The trouble is that it does not explicitly recognize that it is possible that various notions of fault might be at issue in faultless disagreement. Fault is connected to violations of norms. In chapter 4, I will discuss the various kinds of norms that could be at issue in taste disagreements. But for now, let's consider two notions of normativity that could be at play in a disagreement of any sort. First, an individual could violate an *assertoric norm* by saying something assertorically unwarranted. For instance, if we assume that truth is the aim of assertion, an individual could violate an assertoric norm by asserting something false. If an individual violates an assertoric norm, she is assertorically blameworthy. Second, an individual could violate an *epistemic norm* by doing something epistemically unwarranted. For instance, she could form her belief on the basis of inadequate evidence or by disregarding relevant evidence. Any individual who violates an epistemic norm is epistemically blameworthy.

Relativists often focus on assertoric norms, insisting that 'faultlessness' means that both individuals in a disagreement have said something true (or, on a weaker reading, that neither individual has said something false).<sup>53</sup> Defining faultlessness in this way gives relativism, and certain brands of contextualism, the advantage over semantic

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<sup>53</sup>For instance, see MacFarlane, 2007.

theories according to which at most one individual says something true. For instance, this characterization of faultlessness automatically rules out some more sophisticated versions of contextualism according to which taste propositions are descriptions of the tastes of a contextually salient group or of the average person. Such views allow for the possibility that at least one individual in a taste disagreement is mistaken about what is tasty to the group or to the average person, and yet he or she is epistemically blameless for his or her assertion.<sup>54</sup> This way of defining faultlessness also rules out non-truth-conditional approaches such as expressivism. Because my concern in this chapter is to examine the relationship between faultless disagreement and truth conditional semantics, I will set non-truth-conditional approaches aside.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps relativists and baseline contextualists would deserve this advantage if we could be sure that assertoric fault were the only notion of fault in play in (105). However, we should not assume that the appearance of faultlessness in (105) is explained by bilateral truthfulness until we have ruled out competing explanations of this intuition. If it turns out that the feeling of faultlessness in (105) is epistemic, this intuition is compatible with a variety of semantic approaches. While it is important for us to retain neutrality in our initial characterization of faultlessness, it is helpful to make this stance explicit. Unless we specify that there could be more than one type of fault at issue in faultless disagreement, we run the risk of assuming a particular kind of fault. This in turn leads to biasing the debate in favor of a particular theory.

Alternative definitions of faultlessness, such as the one Lasersohn fashions in his 2011 reply to Cappelen and Hawthorn, remain neutral about the content of taste expressions. However, these alternatives often involve assumptions about what grounds the truth of taste claims. Consider Lasersohn's characterization:

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<sup>54</sup>For instance, see Moltmann, 2010, and Schaffer, 2009.

<sup>55</sup>For an excellent discussion of expressivist approaches to this topic, see Dreier, 2009.

As Cappelen and Hawthorne point out, the primary motivation for a relativist semantic theory is to account for the phenomenon of ‘faultless disagreement,’ in which two or more individuals seem intuitively to disagree with each other, but where neither of them seems to be making an error of fact.<sup>56</sup>

Lasersohn’s definition, though not question begging, limits the explanations of faultlessness unnecessarily. Some views—Moltmann’s, for instance—function by assuming that in taste disagreements at least one individual is making an error of fact. In chapters 2, 3, and 4 I will argue that the contrast between (1) and (105) is more complicated than it first appears, and that it is an open question whether such contrasts track a metaphysical distinction between objective matters of fact and subjective matters of taste. In this case, we should be careful not to assume more than necessary about what grounds taste claims.

Other definitions of faultlessness are problematic because they make unnecessary assumptions about the topic of the disagreement. Consider Moltmann’s characterization:

Faultless disagreement consists in a situation in which two agents disagree about the truth of a proposition, with neither apparently being at fault.<sup>57</sup>

This characterization makes explicit assumptions about what is being debated in faultless disagreement: the truth of a proposition. This claim is naturally paired with an assumption about why it is being debated: it is being debated (among other reasons) in order for the participants to have more true beliefs. In disagreements about empirical matters of fact, where it is reasonable to assume both that the participants are making assertions and that truth is the aim of these assertions, the above might

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<sup>56</sup>Lasersohn, 2011, p. 433.

<sup>57</sup>Moltmann, 2010.



be a reasonable assumption. But can we assume the same in a debate about taste? From simply reflecting on (105), we cannot be sure whether truth is the aim of assertion, or whether the participants are even aiming to assert. Nor can we assume that one purpose of such disagreements is for the participants to get closer to the truth. Discovering the topic and purpose of taste disagreements requires substantive philosophical work—a task I attempt to pursue in chapter 4. Until we complete this work, we should refrain from building assumptions about the topic of disagreements into the definition of faultlessness. Furthermore, as we have seen in sections 1.4.3 and 1.5.4, assumptions about the topic and purpose of disagreement cause problems both for relativism and for certain kinds of contextualism.<sup>58</sup> This tendency gives us all the more reason to pursue an independent investigation of the purpose of taste disagreements.

Finally, some definitions of faultlessness, although not begging the question in favor of a particular theory, go wrong in assuming more than is necessary to capture faultless disagreement. For instance, according to Barry Smith’s characterization of faultlessness, the conversational participants are not only fault free but also correct or warranted in some way.

[Faultless disagreement is] where interlocutors are disagreeing, where neither has made a mistake, and where they are both right.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps some readers will have the intuition that in (105), both individuals are right in some sense, in addition to being free of fault. However, because both individuals

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<sup>58</sup>Moltmann’s definition also excludes the possibility of certain expressivist explanations of faultless disagreement, because truth or falsity is not what is at issue according to many expressivists’ understanding of disagreement. We may want to exclude expressivist solutions to faultless disagreement for other reasons, for instance, because of worries about compositionality. However, we should refrain from ruling it out merely in the course of defining faultlessness.

<sup>59</sup>Smith, 2010, p. 4.

could be without fault without also having to be right about anything, this claim seems like more than we need to assume to capture faultless disagreement.

Of course, we cannot remain neutral forever with regard to what characterizes faultless disagreement. Until we know what is meant by faultlessness, it will be difficult to know whether a theory has managed to explain faultless disagreement and hence impossible to resolve the standoff between contextualism and relativism. Furthermore, in order to understand faultless disagreement, we have to take a closer look at taste disagreements themselves. As Jonathan Schaffer points out in his (2009) article, the puzzle of faultless disagreement is generated by looking at a few relatively impoverished examples of taste disagreements. When we consider a wider range of more sophisticated examples, it turns out that faultless disagreement is only one of many data generated by taste disagreements, which are in need of explanation. In the subsequent chapters, I will follow Schaffer in arguing that we can only evaluate a semantic account of predicates of personal taste after we have carefully examined a wide range of taste disagreements. Otherwise, I claim, we risk unfairly biasing the debate from the very beginning.

## 1.7 Conclusion

We have seen that although relativists have used the phenomenon of faultless disagreement to motivate a radical shift in the semantics of predicates of personal taste, in the end both relativism and contextualism have trouble explaining faultless disagreement. Baseline contextualism is burdened with the Problem of Talking Past, but baseline relativism is faced with the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement.

However, we might think that these problems only arise for the most naive versions of contextualism and relativism. In that case, we ought to examine whether more sophisticated versions of these theories fare any better. As we consider more sophisticated versions of the views, we will need to explore our intuitions of faultless-

ness in more depth in the hope that by doing so we will gain a clearer picture of the phenomena these theories are required to capture. It is to this task that I now turn.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOPHISTICATED RELATIVISM

#### 2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explained how cases of faultless disagreement such as (105) have posed a *prima facie* challenge to the idea that predicates of personal taste can be straightforwardly accommodated by the familiar semantic framework of Lewis and Kaplan.

(23) Sam: Is there anything good on tap?

Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all! Guinness, though—now that's tasty.

I went on to canvass two initially promising solutions to this phenomenon—baseline contextualism and baseline relativism—and to show how each of these solutions was faced with specific problems. On the one hand, the contextualist solution to faultless disagreement—taste-specific propositions—generated what I called ‘The Problem of Talking Past.’ On the other hand, the relativist solution to faultless disagreement—combining taste-neutral propositions with a judge parameter—gave rise to what I dubbed ‘The Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement.’ Each problem involves explaining the purpose of taste disagreements given the proposed semantics. Because each view is faced with its own difficulty regarding disagreement, we have arrived at a standoff with regard to this phenomenon.

However, we might think that each of these problems is generated by overly simplistic versions of the semantic theories. If this is true, then perhaps the standoff can

be resolved in favor of one view or the other. In this chapter, I will examine two more sophisticated versions of relativism: a radical brand of relativism championed by John MacFarlane,<sup>1</sup> and a kind of hybrid of contextualism and relativism created by Tamia Stephenson.<sup>2</sup> After giving a brief introduction to Stephenson's and MacFarlane's theories, I will explain their proposals for solving the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement. I will argue that although each of these views goes part of the way toward solving the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement, neither of them can provide a complete solution without giving a theory of the normative aspect of taste disagreements. In chapter 3, I will turn to a more sophisticated version of contextualism—a flexible kind of contextualism developed by Jonathan Schaffer—to see whether it can break the standoff by solving the Problem of Talking Past. I will argue that Schaffer's view, although promising, also has difficulty explaining the normative aspect of taste disagreements. I will conclude that, in order to fully explain taste disagreements, we need to have an independent account of the normative aspect of taste disagreements.

Solving the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement is not the primary goal of either MacFarlane's or Stephenson's accounts. Both MacFarlane and Stephenson are concerned with the larger debate about the semantics of perspectival expressions that I alluded to in chapter 1. However, I've chosen to focus on MacFarlane and Stephenson in this chapter because, unlike many philosophers and linguists who give a semantics for predicates of personal taste, both MacFarlane and Stephenson are aware of the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement, and each offers a promising solution to this problem. Because my primary interest is in taste disagreements, I will focus on the aspects of their theories that are most directly relevant to this issue. Of course, this will mean that there will be several aspects and applications of their theories that I will not cover in my exposition.

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<sup>1</sup>MacFarlane, 2005, 2007, and 2009a.

<sup>2</sup>Stephenson, 2007.

## 2.2 The Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement

In chapter 1, I characterized relativism about taste as the view that the content of sentences containing predicates of personal taste are true or false relative to some factor(s)—usually represented by a taste or judge parameter  $j$ —in addition to a context of utterance and a possible world. The simplest version of relativism, which I called ‘baseline relativism,’ is the view that specifies that  $j$  represents the speaker’s taste perspective at the time of utterance. By adding a judge to the circumstance of evaluation, baseline relativism provides a way for conversational participants to utter contradictory contents while allowing that both individuals could be right. However, the problem arises that, if propositional truth is relative to a judge in the case of predicates of personal taste, it becomes unclear what the *point* of disagreeing with someone is. For instance, although truth may be relative to a world and a time, consider how odd it would be to have a disagreement when the conversational participants are located at different worlds or times. It would seem inappropriate for individuals to disagree about the way the world is when they occupy different worlds. It would also seem inappropriate for individuals to disagree about the way the world is now if they are located at different times. In that case, why should we think it appropriate for individuals to disagree about the way something tastes when they occupy different taste perspectives?<sup>3</sup> In other words, what is the purpose of taste disagreements if taste claims have relative truth values? This problem, which I have named the ‘Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement,’ must be addressed before the relativist can claim to have explained disagreement for taste predicates.

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<sup>3</sup>A number of philosophers have discussed variations on this problem, among them Dreier (2009), Einheuser (2008), MacFarlane (2007), and Schaffer (2009).

## 2.3 Tamina Stephenson: Hybrid Relativism

Tamina Stephenson offers a semantics for predicates of personal taste that is a kind of hybrid between relativism and contextualism. She then pairs this semantic approach with a pragmatic solution to the problem of talking past. In addition to developing a semantics for taste predicates, Stephenson offers a relativistic semantics for epistemic modals. In my critique of Stephenson's solution to the Problem of Talking Past, I will point out some asymmetries between the way the solution works for predicates of personal taste and for epistemic modals. For this reason, it will be helpful to look at Stephenson's account of epistemic modals, as well as her account of taste predicates. In later sections, I will also look at John MacFarlane's account of epistemic modals, because there too I will claim that a similar asymmetry exists between the way his solution to the problem of talking past can be applied to epistemic modals and predicates of personal taste.

Stephenson, like many other philosophers and linguists, has noticed that the phenomenon of faultless disagreement appears to arise for epistemic modals such as 'might' and 'must' in the same way it does for predicates of personal taste. In the case of epistemic modals, truth also seems to depend in some way on a particular epistemic perspective—on what possibilities are left open by a person's evidence. This dependence is apparent in (24), in which Luke and Max are debating about what kind of fish they hooked.

(24) Jacob: What did you catch out on the lake?

Max: I'm no expert, but it might be a rainbow trout.

Luke: No, it can't be. It is missing the pink streak down its side.

Max: All right, then, I was wrong.

It is also apparent in a case of eavesdropping like (25), in which someone outside the conversation comments on Max's claim.

(25) Jacob: What did you catch out on the lake?

Max: I'm no expert, but it might be a rainbow trout.

Ranger Rick [listening in from behind the dock]: No, it can't be. I've been patrolling this lake for 20 years, and I've never seen a rainbow trout.

Here again, it seems as though Max and Luke are each faultless in their assertions, even though their claims appear to contradict each other. We have a similar intuition of faultlessness when considering Max and Ranger Rick's claims, even though Rick is not, strictly speaking, part of the conversation. If the truth of epistemic modal claims depends not just on the way the world is but also on what the world is like for all that is known, we will naturally want to ask how to interpret this dependence in Lewis and Kaplan's semantic framework. How does truth depend on what is known, and who is the relevant knower? Furthermore, in answering these questions, we need to explain why Max should retract his claim if he was faultless in asserting it. After all, Max never asserted that 'the fish *is* a rainbow trout'—a claim about the way the world is. He only asserted that it *might* be.

### 2.3.1 Stephenson's semantic approach

Stephenson offers a baseline relativism for epistemic modals.<sup>4</sup> She makes the truth of epistemic modal claims dependent on the epistemic perspective of a judge by adding a judge parameter  $j$  to the circumstance of evaluation. In the case of 'might,' for instance, Stephenson argues that for any  $\langle w, t, j \rangle$  triple, *Might*  $p$  is true just in case  $p$  is compatible with what  $j$  knows in  $w$  at  $t$ .<sup>5</sup> She thinks of expressions like epistemic modals as being "judge dependent" because the truth of these expressions is directly dependent on a judge.

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<sup>4</sup>See Stephenson, 2007.

<sup>5</sup>Stephenson later revises this analysis using the notion of "epistemic alternatives," but for ease of comparison with other accounts, I'll stick to her original formulation.



However, Stephenson does not opt for baseline relativism in her treatment of predicates of personal taste. Instead, she offers an approach that can be thought of as a hybrid of contextualism and relativism. Inspired by Lasersohn (2005), Stephenson builds a degree of judge dependency into her account of predicates of personal taste. But where Lasersohn opts to make predicates of personal taste directly judge dependent, Stephenson makes them indirectly so. Like Lasersohn, Stephenson adds an individual ‘judge’ parameter to the index of evaluation. However, as Stephenson characterizes predicates of personal taste, they sometimes do not make use of this additional parameter. For Stephenson, predicates of personal taste have two argument places, the first of which represents a person whose taste or experience is relevant. ‘Tasty,’ according to Stephenson, has the meaning given in (26):<sup>6</sup>

$$(26) \quad [[tasty]]^{c:w,t,j} = [\lambda x_e [\lambda y_e. y \text{ tastes good to } x \text{ in } w \text{ at } t]]$$

The first argument place can take a silent pronominal  $PRO_j$  that refers to the judge (the meaning of which is given in (27) below). If it does, then ‘tasty’ is judge dependent.

$$(27) \quad [[PRO_j]]^{c:w,t,j} = j$$

The first argument place can also take either a preposition such as ‘for  $x$ ’ or a phonetically null referential pronoun that refers to a contextually salient individual. In that case, ‘tasty’ is not judge dependent.

### 2.3.2 Explaining contradictory contents and faultlessness

Stephenson is careful to characterize disagreement very narrowly as conversations in which *no* (*it isn’t*) and *nuh-uh* are allowed.

I should clarify that when I say that disagreement is possible in a certain dialog, I mean very narrowly that expressions like *no* (*it isn’t*) and *nuh-uh*

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<sup>6</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 12.

are allowed. I don't mean that we have the intuition that the speakers disagree about something, which may be a broader phenomenon. I don't mean that the disagreement is necessarily a rational or sensible one to engage in.<sup>7</sup>

However, she does assume that a necessary condition for disagreement is that it involves the assertion of contradictory contents.

Both Lasersohn and I assume that two speakers disagree only if the content of the sentence asserted by one is the negation of the one asserted by the other.<sup>8</sup>

Adding a judge parameter to the circumstance of evaluation gives Stephenson a way for the participants in a perspectival disagreement to utter contradictory contents while both are saying something true. Often, the judge of the context is the speaker. As we will see in section 2.3.3, Stephenson also allows  $j$  to represent a plural judge (i.e., the group of conversational participants). However, in cases where the speaker is the judge, a sentence containing a predicate of personal taste or epistemic modals expresses a proposition that can vary in truth depending on who utters it. If the same proposition can have different truth values when uttered by different speakers, then we might be able to better explain the disagreement between Ed and Jim in (105). Either Ed or Jim can act as the judge of what is tasty. When Ed claims that Budweiser is tasty, he is asserting a proposition that is true relative to his tastes at the time of utterance. When Jim says that Budweiser isn't tasty, he is asserting a proposition that is true relative to what his tastes are at the time of utterance. Although Ed and Jim uttered sentences with contradictory contents, each content

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<sup>7</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 31.

is true with regard to the circumstance determined by the context in which each sentence is uttered.

### 2.3.3 Stephenson's solution to the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement

Stephenson is well aware of the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement. In response, she gives an explanation of the purpose of perspectival disagreements, by developing a relativist pragmatics based on Stalnaker's theory of conversation and common ground.<sup>9</sup> For Stalnaker, the goal of conversation is for the participants to "distinguish among possible alternative ways things may be."<sup>10</sup> Conversational participants work to accomplish this goal by determining and updating a common ground or context set. The common ground is the set of propositions that are presupposed by the conversational participants in this fashion. A conversational participant presupposes  $p$ , in Stalnaker's sense, if that individual accepts  $p$ , believes that the other participants accept  $p$ , believes that the other participants believe that she accepts  $p$ , and so on. The conversational context set is the set of worlds (or world-time pairs) that are compatible with those propositions presupposed by the conversational participants (the propositions that make up the common ground).s

When a speaker asserts  $p$ , she is (among other things) proposing that  $p$  be added to the common ground. Upon hearing the speaker's proposal, the group can choose to challenge it. If they do not challenge the proposal,  $p$  becomes part of the common ground. If  $p$  becomes part of the common ground, then all of the worlds that are incompatible with  $p$  are eliminated from the context set. The goal of assertion in a conversation, then, is to reduce the context set by eliminating those worlds that are incompatible with what is said. Stephenson augments Stalnaker's theory to better suit

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<sup>9</sup>See Stalnaker, 1978.

<sup>10</sup>Stalnaker, 1978, p. 322.

relativism by making the context set a set of world-time-judge triples. She proposes that the ‘judge’ for all of the world-time-judge triples of the context set represents the group of participants in the conversation.

According to Stephenson, even though, in the context of a conversation, propositions are true or false relative to the group as the judge, the norm of assertion is what Lasersohn refers to as *autocentric*.<sup>11</sup> For Stephenson, this means that “speakers always make assertions, and accept or reject the assertions of others, using themselves as the judge.”<sup>12</sup> In order for an individual to assert a proposition  $p$ , she only needs to believe that  $p$  is true as judged from her own perspective. If the proposal is successful, it has the effect on the common ground that  $p$  is true as judged by the entire group. On Stephenson’s account, uttering ‘no’ serves to signal a counterproposal. It signals that the proposition asserted should not be added to the common ground.<sup>13</sup>

The main purpose of a perspectival disagreement on Stephenson’s account is to narrow down the set of world-time-judge triples that represents the epistemic states or taste experiences of the group of conversational participants (or, conversely, to keep this set from being narrowed). The point is to locate where the group stands with regard to how something tastes, or with regard to what possibilities are left open by the group’s evidence. Stephenson says,

Essentially, I have proposed that what a group does in a conversation is analogous to what an individual does in developing and revising a set of beliefs: an individual is trying to place him or herself in the space of possible individuals (as reflected in the notion of doxastic alternatives),

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<sup>11</sup>Lasersohn, 2005.

<sup>12</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup>Note that Stephenson often talks about asserting and retracting sentences rather than propositions. For instance, see Stephenson, 2008, pp 20 and 28. She also talks about retracting and assessing utterances. For instance, see Stephenson, 2007, p. 82. In order to avoid confusion, I use ‘proposition’ to refer to what is asserted, assessed, or retracted.

and similarly a group of people in conversation are on a joint venture to place themselves, as a group, in the space of possible plural individuals. In other words, they are trying to align their world views, not only with regard to factual beliefs such as [whether the fish is a rainbow trout], but also with regard to subjective matters such as what is tasty and which epistemic possibilities are still left open. The rules of conversation are set up to let this happen particularly efficiently, by letting a speaker just propose something like “let’s establish that we’re in a world where [the fish is a rainbow trout]” or “let’s establish that we’re a group of people for whom [Budweiser] is tasty” or “let’s establish that our epistemic state leaves it open whether [the fish is a rainbow trout]” without knowing whether their interlocutors will accept the proposal.<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.3.4 Stephenson on retraction and eavesdropping

As Stephenson admits, her pragmatic explanation of disagreement cannot straightforwardly be applied to cases of eavesdropping or retraction.<sup>15</sup> To see why, consider an eavesdropping case such as (25). It would be strange to consider Rick as part of Max and Luke’s conversation, considering that neither of them realizes Rick is listening in. Likewise, it’s difficult to believe Rick’s comment serves as a counterproposal, considering that Rick knew Max and Luke couldn’t hear him protest.

Stevenson points out that she cannot semantically account for cases of retraction either. For instance, on Stephenson’s account, Sally’s retraction in (28) is unexpected because the relevant knowledge for the truth of her claim is that of the judge at the time of evaluation.

(28) Sally: Joe might be in Chicago.

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<sup>14</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 28.

George: He can't be in Chicago. I saw him in the hall five minutes ago.

Sally: Oh, then, I guess I was wrong.<sup>16</sup>

Stephenson explains,

On the view I have proposed, Sally's original sentence is always evaluated with respect to the judge's knowledge *at the time of evaluation* (in this case, the time of utterance, since the sentence is in the present tense), and thus should not "become false" in the face of additional knowledge.

Radical relativism, which I will discuss in a moment, makes use of a separate context of assessment—a context from which claims are assessed for truth or falsity. As we will see, in radical relativism, previous claims can literally become false in the light of additional knowledge. However, Stephenson does not recognize a separate context of assessment. On her view, the judge must be drawn from the context of utterance. This is why Sally's earlier utterance does not become false from a later context of assessment. On her view, propositions are relative to speakers or to groups of speakers, not to individuals who assess those propositions at some later point. At best, on Stephenson's account, Sally could not truthfully utter the proposition expressed by her earlier claim in the later context. Because eavesdropping cases also seem to involve the assessment of an utterance from a separate context of assessment, Stephenson will have a similar problem accounting for eavesdropping.<sup>17</sup>

Though Stephenson can't use retraction or eavesdropping to *motivate* her account, she must at least offer a separate pragmatic explanation of these phenomena.

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<sup>16</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup>I have doubts as to Stephenson's claim that she cannot give a semantic account of retraction. Stephenson seems to suggest that in cases of retraction, an individual retracts a sentence or an utterance. I think that what we retract in these cases (if anything) is a proposition, not an utterance. Because propositional truth is relative to a judge in Stephenson's account, maybe she can handle retraction more straightforwardly than she thinks. The key is explaining how the *t* parameter works in her account.

Stephenson suggests that when Sally admits she was wrong, she is not necessarily admitting that her previous assertion was false. Rather, Sally is admitting to having based her assertion on a false belief—perhaps the belief that Joe was planning a trip to Chicago. This solution might be carried over to eavesdropping cases if the eavesdropper suspected the speaker of having a false belief.

In support of this “mistaken belief strategy,” as I’ll call it, Stephenson argues that we don’t see the same retraction phenomenon occurring with predicates of personal taste. She uses (29) to demonstrate:

(29) Mary: How’s the cake?

Sam: It’s tasty.

Sue: No, it isn’t, it tastes terrible!

Sam: # Oh, then I guess I was wrong.<sup>18</sup>

If Stephenson is correct in thinking that the source of the retraction phenomenon is mistaken belief, then she can explain why we do not make retractions for claims involving predicates of personal taste. In her words:

This [absence] makes sense given that assertions involving predicates of personal taste are normally based only on the speaker’s own experience, which they are unlikely to be mistaken about.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.4 Problems for Stephenson’s pragmatic account

Stephenson has taken an important step toward giving an explanation of the purpose of disagreement on a relativist account. However, her strategy is still problematic. First, it fails to capture certain kinds of retraction and eavesdropping, such

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<sup>18</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 28.

as strong retraction, retraction for taste, and eavesdropping for taste. More importantly, as it stands, Stephenson has only explained a *descriptive* aspect of disagreement about taste and epistemic modals; she has failed to capture a *normative* aspect of disagreement.

#### 2.4.1 Strong retraction

One concern with Stephenson’s account is that it only handles specific kinds of retraction—cases in which the individual says something like ‘I was wrong’—and cannot handle cases of strong retraction, where people say things like ‘What I said was not true’ or ‘What I said was false.’ Stephenson defends what I will call her ‘Mistaken Belief’ solution for retraction and eavesdropping by saying,

Researchers have been too quick to assume that “x is wrong” means “x made a false assertion” or “x made an improper, unjustified move” rather than “x has a false belief.”<sup>20</sup>

However, we might wonder whether Stephenson has been too quick to assume that all cases of retraction take the form of ‘I was wrong’ rather than ‘What I said was not true’ or ‘What I said was false,’ as in (30) and (31).<sup>21</sup>

(30) Max: The fish might be a rainbow trout.

Luke: That’s not true! It can’t be a rainbow trout. It is missing the pink streak down its side.

Max: I see; then what I said was not true.

(31) Max: The fish might be a rainbow trout.

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<sup>20</sup>Stephenson, 2007, p. 87.

<sup>21</sup>Thanks to Phil Bricker for pointing out to me that Stephenson will have difficulty extending the “Mistaken Belief” strategy to cover examples of retraction that rely on ‘that’s false.’ He also pointed out to me that these cases are important to explain because they may motivate a move to a more radical form of relativism (for instance, a relativism like the one found in MacFarlane (2006), which utilizes a context of assessment in addition to a context of utterance).



Luke: That's false! It can't be a rainbow trout. It is missing the pink streak down its side.

Max: I see; then what I said was false.

In cases like (30) and (31), one could argue that it is clearly the *content* of an assertion that is being retracted or denied. If that's true, then it may be difficult to extend Stephenson's Mistaken Belief proposal to cover such cases.

#### 2.4.2 Retraction and eavesdropping for taste

Another possible weakness in Stephenson's account is that it appears to rule out cases of retraction and eavesdropping for predicates of personal taste. Stephenson is confident that no cases of retraction or eavesdropping exist for predicates of personal taste, and that their nonexistence further supports her Mistaken Belief solution. However, as I noted in chapter 1, it seems clear that there are situations in which retraction does arise for predicates of personal taste. These cases seem similar in many ways to cases of retraction for epistemic modals. Consider that, in the case of epistemic modals, we often retract (or appear to retract) claims as our informational state changes over time. Of course, our standards of taste can change over time, as well. In (32), two classmates meet for lunch after one of them has returned from studying abroad:

(32) Amy: Gross! I can't believe you're eating sushi!

Jamee: But it's so tasty.

Amy: No, it isn't; it tastes terrible! In fact, you said so yourself before you left for Japan.

Jamee: I did? Well, then, I was wrong.

Retraction seems equally appropriate in cases in which we lose a taste for something. Consider (33):

(33) Jesse's mom: How are the Cheez-Whiz sandwiches?

Jesse: Sorry, Mom, but they're really not tasty.

Jesse's Mom: But when you were five, you said they were tasty!

Jesse: Well, then, I was wrong.

It also seems possible to have cases of eavesdropping for predicates of personal taste.<sup>22</sup> In (62), Max and Luke listen outside the kitchen as Grandma talks on the phone about what she is making for lunch.

(34) Grandma: Liverwurst is so tasty that I'm going to make liverwurst sandwiches for myself.

Luke: Maybe we should go in and join Grandma for lunch. She says liverwurst is tasty.

Max: Believe me, that's false! Liverwurst is not tasty.

Again, it is difficult to believe that Max thinks Grandma is wrong about some belief about her own taste experience.

It is not clear that Stephenson can explain Jamee's retraction in (32) or Max's comment in (62) the way she explained Max's retraction in (24), i.e., by appealing to mistaken beliefs. After all, as Stephenson herself points out, predicates of personal taste are normally based on the speaker's experience, and people are unlikely to be mistaken about their own taste experiences.<sup>23</sup> And she has good reason for thinking this. Claiming that people are often systematically mistaken about their own experiences of taste would make for a strange account of our psychology. Even if Stephenson can explain away the retraction phenomenon for epistemic modals, she

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<sup>22</sup>In his (2007) paper, MacFarlane brings up the possibility of retraction and eavesdropping for taste claims when he discusses Keith DeRose's (2004) Lewisian-style "sigle scoreboard" solution to the Problem of Talking Past.

<sup>23</sup>In the final sections of this chapter, I will argue that there are ways in which we can be mistaken about our taste experiences. I will expand on this point in chapters 3 and 4.

must explain how to apply the same strategy in dealing with predicates of personal taste. If she can't offer an explanation, she will be left in the awkward position of giving distinct explanations for what seem like almost identical phenomena. In that case, either Stephenson needs to forgo giving a unified treatment of retraction for epistemic modals and predicates of personal taste, or she needs to find a way in which an individual can be mistaken about taste that does not involve the individual being mistaken about his or her own experience.

### 2.4.3 Beyond descriptions

Finally, as it stands, Stephenson's explanation of disagreement may not capture what I claim are examples of persuasive disagreements. In section 2.6.4, I will go further and argue that certain examples of persuasive disagreement point to their being a *normative aspect of taste disagreements*, which I claim goes unexplained in Stevenson's and MacFarlane's accounts.

### 2.4.4 Descriptive versus persuasive disagreements

Solving the problem of inappropriate disagreement requires giving an explanation of the purpose of taste disagreements. However, as I will show, there can be more than one reason for engaging in a taste disagreement.<sup>24</sup> It seems reasonable to think that part of what happens when we disagree about taste is that we discover whether our interlocutor's taste experiences differ from our own taste experiences or inform our interlocutors about our own taste experiences. Let's call examples of taste disagreement where the primary purpose involves this sort of descriptive process *descriptive taste disagreements*.<sup>25</sup> Stephenson seems to have descriptive taste disagreements in mind

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<sup>24</sup>In chapter 4, I will talk in more detail about the various reasons we could have for disagreeing about taste. For now, I just want to divide taste disagreements into two initial categories based on broad purposes for disagreements. I will offer further subcategories in chapter 4.

<sup>25</sup>There might also be disagreements about taste where the sole purpose is not for an individual to describe his or her tastes (or to receive a description of her interlocutor's tastes) but for the

when she says that “a group of people in conversation are on a joint venture to place themselves, as a group, in the space of possible plural individuals.”<sup>26</sup> Description may be the primary purpose or even the sole purpose of some taste disagreements. However, as I will argue below, individuals in a taste disagreement often go beyond what is required of them to accomplish this descriptive task. Instead, in disagreements about taste, we are often also interested in *relocating* ourselves in the space of possible plural individuals, in changing our own taste perspectives or the taste perspectives of our interlocutors. Relocation often involves a descriptive project, since a group cannot relocate itself in the space of worlds if it does not know what position it occupies in that space, but it does not stop there—the end goal is to change positions within the space of worlds. Let’s call disagreements in which the primary goal is for one or more of the participants to change positions *persuasive disagreements*. In order to explain the purpose (or rather purposes) of taste disagreements, the relativist must explain both persuasive and descriptive cases of taste disagreements.

#### 2.4.5 Persuasive disagreements

To see why Stephenson’s account doesn’t capture persuasive disagreements, let’s return to Stephenson’s explanation of the purpose of perspectival disagreement. When we apply Stephenson’s theory to the case of perspectival disagreement, we see that the group is trying to coordinate its information in order to “locate themselves in the space of possible plural individuals.” The way Stephenson puts it, it seems that what the group hopes to gain from a conversation involving epistemic modals is a complete and accurate description of the group’s evidence. Similarly, in a conversation

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individual to express his or her tastes. If that is the case, then we ought to distinguish a third kind of taste disagreement, *expressive disagreements*. For the sake of simplicity, I will include expressive disagreements under descriptive disagreements, while noting that expressive disagreements might deserve their own category.

<sup>26</sup>Stephenson, 2008, p. 22.

involving predicates of personal taste, what the group hopes to gain is a complete and accurate description of the way things taste to the group. For instance, in Stephenson's account, if Ed says, 'Budweiser is tasty,' then because the norms of assertion are autocentric, Jim knows that Budweiser tastes good to Ed. But Jim also knows that if the assertion goes unchallenged, it will serve to narrow down the space of worlds to exclude all of those worlds in which Budweiser does not taste good to the group. When Jim says, 'No, Budweiser is not tasty,' Ed knows that Jim is proposing that 'Budweiser is tasty' be excluded from the common ground. Because the norms of assertion are autocentric, Ed also knows that Budweiser does not taste good to Jim.

However, if Ed and Jim are the only members of the group, then once Ed and Jim each know what tastes good to the other (and to themselves), they have located the group! They are located at some world where Budweiser tastes good to Ed and Budweiser does not taste good to Jim. In that case, there should be no reason to continue the debate—no reason for Ed and Jim to offer evidence to try to change the other's mind. After all, once they have carefully reflected on the matter, it is unlikely that Ed or Jim could be mistaken about what tastes good to them at the time.

Things are similar for epistemic modals. On Stephenson's account, what the group is trying to do in disagreements over epistemic modals is to narrow down the worlds compatible with the group's evidence. That is, they are trying to figure out what worlds are compatible with the group's evidence. For instance, if Max says that the fish might be a rainbow trout, then because the norms of assertion are autocentric, the group knows that his evidence leaves it open whether the fish is a rainbow trout. Likewise, if Luke says the fish can't be a rainbow trout, the group learns that his evidence excludes worlds that are compatible with the fish's being a rainbow trout. Again, once Max and Luke each know what worlds are left open by their interlocutor's evidence and by their own evidence, they have located their group in the space of possible plural individuals. At that point, if the point of Max's

and Luke's disagreement is simply to figure out where they both stand on the matter, there should be no reason to continue the debate. After all, while either of them could be mistaken about whether the fish is or is not a rainbow trout, they are unlikely to be mistaken about whether they each *believe* that it is or is not a rainbow trout. However, as I will argue below, there are many examples of taste disagreements in which the participants go well beyond what is required to accomplish this descriptive project. If that is the case, then Stephenson has not fully solved the problem of talking past, because the explanation of the purpose of taste disagreements is incomplete.

#### 2.4.5.1 Offering evidence

To begin with, the participants in both taste disagreements and disagreements involving epistemic modals offer additional evidence for their positions—something that would not be necessary if the purpose of perspectival disagreements were merely descriptive. We have already seen examples of disagreements involving epistemic modals in which participants offer one another evidence that goes beyond what is necessary to give a description of the possibilities left open by the group's evidence. For instance, in (24), Luke tries to persuade Max to update his informational state by offering Max evidence about the distinguishing marks of a rainbow trout. It may seem that Luke is really just offering a further description about his epistemic state. However, we should keep in mind that the evidence Luke offers is evidence about the trout, not about his epistemic state.

Although it may seem surprising, there are also cases of tastes disagreements in which individuals seem to offer evidence about the tastiness of an item, and not just evidence about what things taste good to them. For instance, it is not difficult to imagine how Ed and Jim might continue their conversation about Budweiser, each of them trying to persuade the other by offering evidence for their positions.

(35) Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all! It's so watered down that it hardly tastes like beer. If you developed your palate by tasting more beers, you would see what I mean.

Ed: Budweiser is tasty! Budweiser is crisp and refreshing, just like American ales are supposed to be. You're just expecting the wrong things from it by comparing it to other styles of beer.<sup>27</sup>

Here it seems that Ed and Jim are trying to do more than locate themselves in the space of possible plural individuals. Rather, we could think of them as trying to *change* their position in the space of possible plural individuals. In other words, it seems as though they are trying to *coordinate* their views instead of (or in addition to) simply expressing or describing them.

#### 2.4.5.2 Offering evidence from a perspective outside the group

A related worry for Stephenson's account is that, in disagreements involving predicates of personal taste or epistemic modals, individuals will often make reference to the information or tastes of people outside the conversation.<sup>28</sup> Consider cases like (36) and (37), in which both Lowell and Donovan cite the information or tastes of someone outside their respective conversation as evidence for their positions.

(36) Jim: Heidegger might be the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Lowell: He can't be. Sam's teaching a class on Nietzsche, and he said Nietzsche was the author.

(37) Maria: Flavored coffee is tasty.

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<sup>27</sup>In his 2009 article, Jonathan Schaffer also argues that there are cases of substantive taste disagreements—for instance, cases of ongoing debate in which evidence is offered.

<sup>28</sup>This point was brought up to me by Ana Aguilar Guevara during conversation.

Donovan: You're wrong. Flavored coffee isn't tasty, and everyone here at the cafe agrees with me.<sup>29</sup>

Any information about the tastes or epistemic states of individuals outside of the conversation is irrelevant to locating the position of the group in the space of possible individuals. However, such information does seem relevant to the project of group relocation. In fact, it seems that conversational participants often change their minds or retract previous claims on the basis of such information.

#### 2.4.6 Response for Stephenson

Can Stephenson account for retraction, eavesdropping, and persuasive taste disagreements? It could be that when Stephenson offered her pragmatic account of disagreement, she was (perhaps inadvertently) relying on the fact that disagreement about epistemic modals involves *coordinating* the group's beliefs as to objective matters of fact. It makes sense, then, that she would apply Stalnaker's theory of assertion to perspectival disagreement. In Stalnaker's theory, the group in an objective disagreement is trying to narrow down the space of possible worlds in the context set. Of course, a lot of argument will ensue over how to narrow down the space of worlds—about whose evidence we should take seriously. This, of course, is because a person's evidence can fail to match up with the way the world is. The group is, in part, trying to figure out whose evidence is accurate and come up with a collective body of evidence that accurately represents the way the world is.

According to Stephenson, what the group is trying to do in disagreements over epistemic modals is narrow down the worlds compatible with the group's evidence.

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<sup>29</sup>This example is based on one that Ana Aguilar Guevara brought up to me in conversation. Ana has a different explanation for why Donovan says, 'And everyone agrees with me' from the one I suggest. I take it that her main point is that we sometimes cite as evidence for our claims the opinions of people outside the conversation. Ana says that this points to a *generic* use of 'tasty.' I suggest that, whether or not there is a generic use of 'tasty,' such examples arise because there is a persuasive aspect of disagreement.



But as we've seen, more goes on in a disagreement about epistemic modals than describing what each member of the group believes. The participants often go on to offer their interlocutors evidence—evidence designed to persuade their interlocutors to change their minds. This persuasive aspect makes perfect sense if the group now has to figure out whether its beliefs accurately represent the way the world is. In that case, members of the group will often offer further evidence to demonstrate that their beliefs are accurate. Here, it should be clear that the members of the group are interested not only in what their evidence is but also in what their evidence *ought* to be. Members can update their evidence and change their beliefs as they attempt to describe what their evidence is. Why coordinate epistemic perspectives? I will say more about the motivation for coordination when I consider MacFarlane's view. But one answer is that the process of belief coordination is made worthwhile for the participants of the conversation because of the existence of epistemic norms that, if followed, will increase the likelihood that the group will share an accurate picture of the world.

However, it isn't yet clear how Stephenson could carry this solution over to taste, especially considering her views on the unlikely existence of errors with regard to taste claims. In order to know whether her solution can capture cases of persuasive taste disagreements, we will have to answer a lot of questions. For instance, is there even such a thing as accuracy in the case of taste? Are there facts of the matter with regard to taste, and if so, what determines them? Is it even possible to coordinate our tastes? Could there be taste norms that guide coordination for taste? If not, what could motivate taste coordination?

In chapters 4 and 5, I will try to answer these questions. After doing so, I will explain how it may be possible to rework Stephenson's solution to accommodate persuasive taste disagreements. However, for now, I will examine a sophisticated version of relativism championed by John MacFarlane to see if it can overcome the

Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement. I will argue that MacFarlane’s view runs into problems similar to Stephenson’s, and that ultimately we must answer the same sorts of questions before we can know whether MacFarlane solves the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement.

## 2.5 John MacFarlane: Radical Relativism

### 2.5.1 MacFarlane’s semantic approach

John MacFarlane argues that baseline relativism of the sort I discussed in chapter 1 is not relativistic enough to handle puzzles involving perspectival phenomena. For instance, MacFarlane claims that baseline relativism “is a kind of relativism about beauty [or knowledge, etc.], perhaps, but not about truth.”<sup>30</sup> He goes on to note that, because utterance truth is absolute on baseline relativism, “There is always an absolute answer to the question, ‘Is *S* true at *c*?’ or ‘Did *A* utter *S* truly?’”<sup>31</sup>

According to radical relativists, even the truth of *utterances* of perspectival sentences is relative—relative to a context of assessment. But instead of (or in addition to) adding an extra parameter to the circumstance of evaluation, radical relativists change the definition of truth of the occurrence of a sentence. On radical relativism, the truth of a sentence must be relativized to both a context of use and a context of assessment.

Although MacFarlane suggests that predicates of personal taste be given radical relativistic treatment, he uses epistemic modals to explicitly demonstrate his semantic approach. MacFarlane focuses on predicates of personal taste when discussing perspectival disagreements in his (2007) article. However, he does not offer a formal semantics of these terms. I will use his account of epistemic modals as a guide

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<sup>30</sup>MacFarlane, 2005, p. 324.

<sup>31</sup>MacFarlane, 2005, p. 324.

to a radical relativism for predicates of personal taste. MacFarlane’s semantics for epistemic modals initially resembles a kind of baseline relativism. For instance, his semantics for ‘might’ involves adding a parameter  $i$  to the circumstance of evaluation that represents an information state—a set of worlds compatible with what is known.

$\lceil \text{Might} : \Phi \rceil$  is true at  $\langle C, w, i, a \rangle$  iff for some  $w'$  in  $i$ ,  $\Phi$  is true at  $\langle C, w', i, a \rangle$ <sup>32</sup>

However, MacFarlane goes beyond baseline relativism by defining a “doubly contextual truth predicate” where  $i$  is determined by the context of assessment rather than the context of utterance. First, MacFarlane defines the context of utterance and the context of assessment as follows:

- **Context of Use [utterance]:** the setting for an actual or possible use of a sentence (or proposition) in a speech act or mental act.
- **Context of Assessment:** the setting from which such a use is being assessed for truth or falsity on some actual or possible occasion of assessment.<sup>33</sup>

Then MacFarlane defines the truth of the occurrence of a sentence as follows:

An **occurrence of a sentence**  $\Phi$  at a context  $C_U$  is true as assessed from a context  $C_A$  iff  $\Phi$  is true at every point of evaluation  $\langle C_U, i_{C_A} w_{C_U}, a \rangle$ , where

- $i_{C_A}$  = the set of worlds that aren’t excluded by what is known at  $(C_A)$  by the agent centered on  $C_A$ ,
- $w_{C_U}$  = the world of  $C_U$ ,

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<sup>32</sup>MacFarlane, 2008, p. 26. MacFarlane defines a *point of evaluation* as “an ordered quadruple  $\langle C, i, w, a \rangle$ , where  $C$  is a context,  $i$  is a set of possible worlds representing an *information state* (intuitively, the worlds left open by a particular state of information),  $w$  is a possible world, and  $a$  is an *assignment* of objects from the domain relevant at  $C$  to the variables.”

<sup>33</sup>MacFarlane, 2008, p. 20.

- $a$  = an assignment of objects from the domain of  $C$  to the variables.<sup>34</sup>

On this definition of truth at a context, the context of *utterance* helps determine the content of a sentence. It also fixes the world parameter. The context of *assessment* provides the information state that is relevant in determining the truth of the content. Let's call this view of utterance truth, where utterances are true or false relative to an assessor, a *radical pragmatics* to contrast it with the moderate pragmatics baseline relativists employ. On MacFarlane's view, one and the same utterance can be true relative to one context of assessment, and false relative to another. Accordingly, Max's utterance of 'The fish might be a rainbow trout' in (24) expresses a truth, as assessed by Luke, just in case what Luke knows (at the time of assessment) does not rule out the fish being a rainbow trout.<sup>35</sup> And yet, because Max is an assessor as well as a speaker, his claim expresses a truth, as assessed by him, just in case what Max knows (at the time of his assessment) does not rule out that the fish is a rainbow trout.

### 2.5.1.1 Utterance truth versus propositional truth

Of course, as MacFarlane admits, utterance truth is a technical notion. In his earlier papers, MacFarlane often talks about the assessment of a claim or assertion. This makes it difficult to see whether he is talking about the act of claiming or asserting or about what is claimed or asserted (the proposition asserted). Ordinary speakers predicate the truth or falsity of what is claimed or asserted—applying these predicates to propositions, not to utterances.<sup>36</sup> Assuming that utterances express propositions, individuals assess the truth of an utterance only by way of assessing the

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<sup>34</sup>MacFarlane, 2008, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup>This last line is taken almost directly from MacFarlane, 2008, p. 21. I've just changed the example it refers to.

<sup>36</sup>See MacFarlane, 2008 and 2009.

truth of the proposition expressed by an utterance. It should be noted that, although MacFarlane makes a point of emphasizing that *utterance truth* is relative on his view, it looks as though it is really propositional truth that is at issue in the puzzles about perspectival expressions.<sup>37</sup>

MacFarlane reformulates the extension of the predicate ‘True’ as it is used in the object language—as it is used by ordinary speakers to apply to propositions.

The extension of ‘True’ at a point of evaluation  $\langle C_U, i_{C_A} w_{C_U}, a \rangle$  is the set of propositions  $p$  such that  $p$  is true at  $\langle w, i \rangle$ .<sup>38</sup>

On this formulation, propositions are only true or false relative to a world and an information state. MacFarlane notes that on his definition, ‘True’ is also disquotational, as “every instance of the following schema is logically necessary (true at every point of evaluation):

$$\forall x((x = \textit{the proposition that } P) \supset (\textit{True}(x) \equiv P))$$

(where  $P$  is replaced by a sentence).”<sup>39</sup> Given his treatment of truth, it follows that “when  $P$  is assessment-sensitive, and  $\alpha$  denotes the proposition expressed by  $P$ ,  $\ulcorner \textit{True}(\alpha) \urcorner$  will also be assessment-sensitive.”<sup>40</sup> Note that the extra parameter  $i$  is idle when a sentence does not contain an assessment-sensitive expression.

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<sup>37</sup>It should be noted that the salient difference between MacFarlane’s view and baseline relativism is that the individual parameter is set by the context of assessment rather than the context of utterance. The relativization of utterance truth comes into play mainly when he develops the norms of assertion and assessment for radical relativism.

<sup>38</sup>MacFarlane, 2008, p. 31.

<sup>39</sup>MacFarlane, 2008, p. 31.

<sup>40</sup>MacFarlane, 2008, p. 31.

### 2.5.2 MacFarlane’s solution to the problem of inappropriate disagreement

Radical relativism can semantically accommodate both retraction and eavesdropping for epistemic modals and predicates of personal taste. For instance, in (30) and (31), Max’s utterance literally becomes false relative to the context in which he assesses his previous claim, because his epistemic state has changed. Likewise, because an eavesdropper occupies a separate context of assessment, it is perfectly appropriate for her to comment on the truth of someone’s claim even if she is not a part of the original conversation.

But does radical relativism explain the purpose of disagreement in a way that will solve the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement? We may worry that perspectival disagreement is even more mysterious if both propositional truth and utterance truth are relative to a context of assessment. At least on Stephenson’s account, given a context of utterance, utterance truth is absolute. We can aim for truth at a context of utterance because there is always one right answer to who the judge is at that context—the group of conversational participants. However, if radical relativism is true, the judge is set by the context of assessment. The very same utterance may be true relative to one context of assessment but false relative to another. In that case, what could be the point of making an utterance when your utterance may be false relative to the context of assessment occupied by your interlocutor?

#### 2.5.2.1 MacFarlane on assertion

The first step MacFarlane takes towards answering these questions is to explain the role his doubly contextual truth predicate ‘true at a context of use  $C_U$  and a context of assessment  $C_A$ ’ plays in the speech act of assertion.<sup>41</sup> He notes that the traditional characterization of the role of truth as the ‘aim of assertion’ seems inappropriate for

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<sup>41</sup>See MacFarlane, 2005, esp. pp. 328 and 337.

relative truth.<sup>42</sup> After all, what does it mean to ‘aim at truth’ if truth is relative to assessors? Instead of focusing on the norms *for* making an assertion, MacFarlane explicates the role of truth in terms of the normative *consequences* of making an assertion. In his view, “an assertion (even an insincere one) is a *commitment to the truth* of the proposition asserted.”<sup>43</sup> MacFarlane explains that in committing ourselves to “asserting an assessment-sensitive proposition,”<sup>44</sup> we are committing ourselves to three things:

- (W) In asserting that  $p$  at  $C_1$ , one commits oneself to withdrawing the assertion (at any future context  $C_2$ ) if  $p$  is shown to be untrue relative to a context of use  $C_1$  and a context of assessment  $C_2$ .
- (J) In asserting that  $p$  at  $C_1$ , one commits oneself to justifying the assertion when the assertion is appropriately challenged. To justify the assertion in a context  $C_2$  is to provide grounds for the truth of  $p$  relative to a context  $C_1$  and a context of assessment  $C_2$ .
- (R) In asserting that  $p$  at  $C_1$ , one commits oneself to accepting responsibility (at any future context  $C_2$ ) if on the basis of this assertion someone else takes  $p$  to be true (relative to the context of  $C_1$  and the context of assessment  $C_2$ ) and it proves to be untrue (relative to  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ ).<sup>45</sup>

### 2.5.2.2 MacFarlane on the purpose of disagreement

MacFarlane thinks that, by reconsidering the norms of assertion, we can make sense of assertion in a perspectival disagreement. According to relativism, one and

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<sup>42</sup>See Dummett, 1959, for an explanation of truth as the aim of assertion.

<sup>43</sup>MacFarlane, 2005, p. 333.

<sup>44</sup>MacFarlane, 2005, p. 337

<sup>45</sup>MacFarlane, 2005, p. 337.

the same utterance (or occurrence) of a sentence can be true relative to one context of assessment, and false relative to another. Accordingly, Max's utterance of 'The fish might be a rainbow trout' in (24) expresses a truth, as assessed by Luke, just in case what Luke knows (at the time of assessment) does not rule out the fish's being a rainbow trout. Because Luke's evidence does rule out that possibility, he should judge Max's claim to be false. On the other hand, Max is an assessor as well as a speaker. As such, his claim expresses a truth, as assessed by him, just in case what Max knows (at the time of his assessment) does not rule out the fish's being a rainbow trout. At the time he uttered the claim, Max's evidence left open the possibility that the fish was a rainbow trout. However, when he utters the claim, Max also commits to withdrawing it if it is shown to be false relative to any future context of assessment. Once Max learns that rainbow trouts have pink streaks, he occupies a new context of assessment. Because his original claim is false relative to this new context, he is assertorically obligated to retract it.

### **2.5.2.3 Explaining persuasive taste disagreements on MacFarlane's account**

In presenting us with a new set of assertoric norms, MacFarlane has given us an explanation of how the conversational participants are assertorically committed in uttering and retracting their claims. However, we still need an explanation of why, if propositions and utterances are assessment-sensitive, individuals would bother to challenge their interlocutors' claims. For instance, why should an individual be motivated to force another to withdraw her claim? Furthermore, even if such challenges are motivated in disagreements involving epistemic modals, are they ever really appropriate in disagreements involving predicates of personal taste? What would be



the point of trying to force someone to withdraw her claim?<sup>46</sup> What sort of justification could someone give for a taste claim, and how could it be challenged? Unless we know the answers to these questions, we won't be able to tell if MacFarlane can explain the persuasive aspects of disagreement any better than Stephenson can. Although MacFarlane never gives us a detailed answer to this question, he suggests that perspectival expressions like predicates of personal taste and epistemic modals are *controversy inducing* and that controversy fosters coordination. He says,

Assessment-sensitive expressions are designed, it seems, to foster controversy, where use-sensitive expressions preclude it. But what is the point of fostering controversy in “subjective” domains, if there is no (nonrelative) truth on which both parties can converge? Why shouldn't we just talk about our own tastes, rather than ascribing subjective properties to the objects? Perhaps, then, the point of using controversy-inducing assessment-sensitive vocabulary is to foster *coordination* of contexts...In the case of epistemic states, it is manifestly in our interest to share a picture of the world, and to learn from others when they know things that we do not.<sup>47</sup>

In the following sections, I will elaborate on MacFarlane's idea of context coordination and show how it might be used to explain the persuasive aspect of disagreements involving epistemic modals. However, I'll show that more work needs to be done before we can apply his solution to predicates of personal taste. I'll argue that context coordination only helps provide an explanation of the point of epistemic modal

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<sup>46</sup>Thanks to Phil Bricker for pointing out to me that MacFarlane's assertoric commitment (w) seems especially unmotivated for taste claims.

<sup>47</sup>MacFarlane, 2007, pp. 21-22.

disagreement if we recognize the role of epistemic norms.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, I'll argue that context coordination only makes sense for predicates of personal taste if we recognize a normative aspect to taste.

## 2.6 Problems for MacFarlane's coordination explanation

### 2.6.1 Why coordinate in epistemic modal disagreement?

MacFarlane's comment about context coordination goes part of the way to explaining the purpose of perspectival disagreement. However, more needs to be said before we can be satisfied with his explanation. I'll begin by examining MacFarlane's explanation as he applies it to epistemic modals and then discuss whether we can apply his explanation to predicates of personal taste.

For MacFarlane, the participants in disagreement involving epistemic modals are arguing over a proposition that has relative truth values. However, if disagreements about taste are not about objective matters of fact, then why should such claims inspire controversy? Furthermore, why should controversy foster coordination? MacFarlane says,

Controversy encourages coordination because, in general, controversy is uncomfortable. But why should controversy feel uncomfortable even when the disagreement is entirely due to differences in the interlocutors' respective contexts of assessment? One possible answer is: it just is. That's a brute psychological fact about us. Perhaps, as Allan Gibbard suggests (Gibbard 1990, 217), there is an evolutionary explanation. Assessment-sensitive expressions exploit this psychological fact about us—our ten-

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<sup>48</sup>I think the best way of understanding what MacFarlane means when he talks about "context coordination" is as a kind of "perspective coordination." Because MacFarlane thinks contexts are concrete situations, it makes more sense to coordinate our beliefs or our tastes (or even our beliefs about tastes) than it does to coordinate contexts. In that case, the idea of context coordination can be carried over to Stephenson's account, even though she doesn't recognize contexts of assessment.

dency to treat dispute as a crisis to be resolved—to foster subjective coordination by provoking controversy.<sup>49</sup>

It is hard to be satisfied with MacFarlane’s appeal to brute psychological facts as an explanation of the controversy-inducing nature of perspectival expressions.<sup>50</sup> However, I will set that worry aside for the moment. Instead, I’ll focus on why MacFarlane thinks claims involving epistemic modals foster coordination. Again, MacFarlane says with regard to epistemic modals, “It is manifestly in our interest to share a picture of the world.” However, we need to ask, *why* is it in our interest to share a picture of the world, and which picture is it in our interest to share? So far, MacFarlane has only told us that it is in our interest to coordinate our epistemic states; he hasn’t told us how to go about it. Does it matter how people coordinate their epistemic states? Perhaps, in some cases, coordinating epistemic states is itself valuable, regardless of which way the participants coordinate their beliefs. For instance, it might save a lot of arguing if my partner comes to share my beliefs, even if they aren’t true. However, these sorts of pragmatic reasons for coordination won’t apply to every case of disagreement. MacFarlane claims that epistemic coordination is *manifestly* in our interest. Presumably, he doesn’t think that the mere act of coordination is in our interest. Consider a case like (101), in which Phil and Barak coordinate their beliefs about the direction of the finish line during an orienteering competition.

(38) Barak: The finish line might be to the north.

Phil: It can’t be to the north. The compass says that it’s to the south.

Barak: You’re right; it must be to the south. Let’s go.

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<sup>49</sup>MacFarlane, 2007, p. 22.

<sup>50</sup>Below, I will argue that the reason that epistemic modal claims are controversy-inducing, if they are, is because disagreements involving epistemic modal claims really target the embedded objective claims.

Assuming the finish line is actually to the north, then it is not in Phil’s or Barak’s interest to share Barak’s picture of the world. In that case, MacFarlane must have a more objective goal in mind for Barak and Phil than merely coordinating their pictures of the world.

## **2.6.2 A solution for MacFarlane regarding epistemic modals**

### **2.6.2.1 Epistemic norms and the value of coordination**

It seems to me that sharing a picture of the world is manifestly in our interest, so long as our views of the world accurately represent the way the world is. Of course, epistemic modal claims don’t necessarily represent the way the world is *actually*; they represent the way the world is for all that is known. However, this need not be a problem for the relativist. That is because, embedded in every epistemic modal claim such as “The finish line *might* be to the north,” there is a completely objective claim such as “the finish line *is* to the north.” It seems that what we are doing when we utter epistemic modal claims is to try to coordinate our beliefs about the embedded objective claims such that they correspond to reality. This project is especially productive because there are *epistemic norms* in place about how we should coordinate our beliefs about objective matters. In most cases, if we follow these norms, our beliefs are more likely to reflect the way the objective world is. It is only manifestly in our interest to share a picture of the world if our picture corresponds to reality. In that case, it is an epistemic value—in particular, truth—that drives disagreement involving epistemic modals.

Let’s call cases of disagreement with a normative aspect *normative disagreements*. Normative disagreements make up a subcategory of persuasive disagreements. As we have seen, in persuasive disagreements one or more of the conversational participants is trying to change her interlocutor’s mind. What distinguishes normative taste disagreements is that they are disagreements in which one or more of the participants

thinks that her interlocutor *ought* to change his or her mind. Not all persuasive disagreements will be normative ones. For instance, there may be cases of taste disagreements in which a person might want her interlocutor to change his or her position, but where that person doesn't think that the interlocutor ought to change his or her position.

### 2.6.2.2 Alternative values and coordination

The pursuit of epistemic value is one important reason for disagreement in the epistemic case. However, this is not to say that the pursuit of truth is always what drives epistemic disagreement. There are other sorts of values that could underlie disagreement, and other sorts of norms that are aimed at those values. For example, in many cases, disagreement is driven by some kind of pragmatic value. Pragmatic value and epistemic value can come apart. For instance, in some cases the goal of a disagreement is to get someone to believe something that is not true. In (39), Mark is throwing Chris a surprise party, but he is afraid she is on to him. He explicitly tries to get her to believe something false by misrepresenting his epistemic state.

(39) Chris: You must be throwing me a surprise party! My best friend's car is parked on the street.

Mark: I might not be throwing you a surprise party. Your friend could be going to the neighbor's house.

In (39), Mark's ultimate goal is to surprise Chris. In order to do this, he has to convince Chris not to share his picture of the world, but instead to have a false picture of the world. Likewise, there will be cases where it may be in the interest of both of the conversational participants to share a false picture of the world. For instance, consider a religious debate such as (40).

(40) Hopeful Devotee: I want to believe, but the Spaghetti Monster God might not exist!

Religious Leader: Fear not, the Spaghetti Monster God must exist!

Presumably, even if the Spaghetti Monster God does not exist, it may be beneficial in some way for Hopeful Devotee to coordinate her epistemic perspective with the leaders. However, the fact that pragmatic value often drives epistemic disagreements doesn't undermine the fact that many epistemic disagreements are driven by a more universally compelling value. Appealing to an objective epistemic value like truth helps explain the purpose of the majority of epistemic disagreements and why epistemic coordination is manifestly in our interest.

### 2.6.2.3 Epistemic modals: What are they good for?

I've argued that MacFarlane's coordination explanation for epistemic modals is only convincing if (1) disagreements are actually about the embedded objective claims, and (2) there are epistemic norms that govern coordination. However, if the purpose of epistemic modal disagreement is to coordinate our beliefs about the objective claims, why don't individuals simply utter the embedded claims directly in the disagreement? Why should they bother using epistemic modals at all? Until we can explain this, we don't really have an explanation of disagreements involving epistemic modals.

I think the right thing to say is that using epistemic modal claims is a convenient way for an individual to give her interlocutor some information about the *strength* of her evidence without having to offer any specific details about her evidence.<sup>51</sup> To see what epistemic modals can add to a disagreement over and above unembedded objective claims, let's return to Max's and Luke's disagreement about the fish. Imagine

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<sup>51</sup>Here, I am not suggesting that epistemic modals are force modifiers, only that they can be used to indirectly relate information about the strength of someone's evidence. On a force-modifier approach, sentences containing epistemic modals are not used to make assertions; rather, they are used to make what MacFarlane (2008) labels "perhapsertations." A perhapsertation is "a distinct kind of speech act, which we might understand as the expression of some minimal degree of credence, or advice not to ignore a possibility" (MacFarlane, 2008, p. 16). On this view, epistemic modals simply signal a perhapsertation, and as such do not make a contribution to the truth conditions of the expression containing them.

that neither Max nor Luke is a known expert, and that neither one of them has offered any additional evidence for their claims. Max and Luke could use either alethic claims, as in (41), or epistemic modal claims, as in (42), to disagree about whether the fish is a rainbow trout.

(41) Jacob: What did you catch out on the lake?

Max: It's a rainbow trout.

Luke: No, it's not.

(42) Jacob: What did you catch out on the lake?

Max: It might be a rainbow trout.

Luke: No, it can't be.

Arguably, in (41) the disagreement ought to result in a standoff with neither person giving in. That is because neither Max nor Luke have offered any additional evidence for their claims, nor do they have any reason to defer on the basis of expertise. However, the situation is different in (42). So long as Max and Luke take one another to be trustworthy, the disagreement need not end in a standoff. That is because, in using epistemic modals, Max and Luke have not given any specific evidence for their claims; each man has given some indication of the strength of his evidence. If Luke says the fish must be a rainbow trout, then assuming Luke is trustworthy, Max now has evidence that Luke has evidence that rules out the possibility that the fish is not a rainbow trout. This gives Max a good reason to retract his claim, even without hearing what Luke's evidence specifically is. On the other hand, Luke does not have reason to retract his claim. From Max's claim, Luke can only infer that Max's evidence leaves open that the fish is a rainbow trout. For all Luke knows, Max has no evidence one way or the other. Granted, 'might' is compatible with 'must.' However, assuming that Max is trying to be maximally informative, then he wouldn't have used 'might' if he had evidence that ruled out the possibility that the fish was

not a rainbow trout. In that case, Luke has a reason to stand his ground for the time being.

Because modal claims represent an individual's epistemic state and not just the way the world is, they are especially useful in a disagreement. Although the disagreement itself may be over an objective matter of fact, in using epistemic modal claims, each participant can gather information about what things are like from the other person's perspective.

### **2.6.3 Coordination for taste?**

Once it's clear that a major reason for engaging in an epistemic modal disagreement is for the participants to coordinate their objective beliefs about the world in accordance with certain epistemic norms, we have some explanation of the persuasive aspect of disagreement involving epistemic modals. This explanation makes sense of why the participants often offer evidence, appeal to experts, and also appeal to others from outside the conversation. However, does it make sense to apply the coordination explanation to explain persuasive disagreements involving predicates of personal taste? After all, it doesn't look as though predicates of personal taste embed objective claims in the way epistemic modals do. In what way, then, are the participants in a disagreement about taste trying to coordinate contexts? Are they trying to share a picture of the world, perhaps a picture of the way the world tastes? If so, whose picture are they trying to share, and why is it in their interest to share it? Furthermore, why should taste claims inspire controversy at all? It's unclear why there should be any sense of controversy if, as MacFarlane seems to suggest, disagreements are not about the tastiness of an item and there no fact of the matter as to what is really tasty.



Although MacFarlane uses coordination to explain the motivation for both epistemic modals and taste disagreements, he offers a different explanation in each case for why coordination is in our interest. He says,

We have an interest in sharing standards of taste, senses of humor, and epistemic states with those around us. The reasons are different in each case. In the case of humor, we want people to appreciate our jokes, and we want them to tell jokes we appreciate.<sup>52</sup>

According to MacFarlane, the motivation for coordination in the taste case is purely pragmatic. In particular, it has social value. Certainly there are pragmatic reasons for coordinating tastes, and many taste disagreements have this value as their aim. For instance, it may be much easier for you and I to decide where to eat dinner if we share tastes. I think appealing to pragmatic value (in particular, social value) can explain some cases of normative disagreements. However, if the end goal is just coordination, it shouldn't matter how we coordinate for taste. Perhaps self-interested reasons come into play—I would rather you share my tastes, and you would rather I share yours. But from an objective point of view, one way of coordinating is just as good as another. However, this explanation does not mirror our actual linguistic practices.

As I will demonstrate below, we often act as if not all ways of coordinating our taste perspectives are equal. We sometimes seem to follow rules about how to change our tastes and whom to defer to when our tastes differ from other people's tastes. When we try to persuade someone to change his or her views about an item's tastiness, we often try to convince that person in accordance with these rules. In many cases, the reasons we give for our positions don't seem arbitrary, as they should if there is no fact of the matter as to who is right. Instead, when we argue about taste, we point to

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<sup>52</sup>MacFarlane, 2007, p. 22.

properties of the object, which makes it seem as though we are debating about what is really tasty. This phenomenon should lead us to conclude that taste disagreements are motivated by something more universal than pragmatic value.

## 2.6.4 Normative taste disagreements

### 2.6.4.1 Examples of normative taste disagreements

There are many examples in which disagreements about taste mirror the normative aspect of disagreements about epistemic modals. With disagreements involving epistemic modals, we saw that there were many ways to persuade someone to have a different picture of the world. Similarly, there might be many ways to convince someone that his or her tastes ought to be different. Sometimes we may try to change a person's tastes directly by changing the way things taste to them. For instance, sometimes someone can get you to change your mind about the way something tastes by getting you to notice certain properties of an item or experience that you hadn't noticed before. The next time you taste the item, you may have a different taste experience. On the basis of this new experience, you may change your position on the tastiness of the item. This seems to be what is going on in (74).

(43) Heidi: Why didn't you order strawberry jam? Orange marmalade isn't  
tasty at all.

Tonya: Orange marmalade is tasty; you just don't know what to look for.  
The bitterness of orange rind perfectly complements the sweetness of the  
jam.

Heidi: [Tastes it again] You know, you're right. Orange marmalade is tasty.

Sometimes we may try to change someone's tastes indirectly by changing the person's beliefs about what his or her taste experience ought to be.<sup>53</sup> Individuals will retract their previous claim even without acquiring a new taste experience. For instance, sometimes it seems appropriate for someone to retract a claim on the basis of testimony alone. In (57), Helen and Jeff are at a wine tasting put on by the local wine-and-spirits emporium. Helen is a connoisseur, while Jeff has very little experience with wine.

(44) Helen: What kind of wine are you interested in buying?

Jeff: Franzia is tasty.

Helen: Believe me, Franzia is not tasty.

Jeff: Oh, then, I guess I was wrong.<sup>54</sup>

If someone is an expert, then merely hearing that this person disagrees with you can give you reason to change your mind or to retract what you said. This can be true even in cases in which your own taste experience of the world has not changed.<sup>55</sup>

In certain cases, testimonial evidence can be made even stronger if a number of testifiers agree on a subject. This explains why, in (45), Donovan should refer to the opinions of people outside the conversation when he argues with Jeff.

(45) Jeff: Busch beer is tasty.

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<sup>53</sup>We may also have beliefs about the way things ought to taste to us, and at times we may try to coordinate these beliefs even in cases in which there is no hope that our taste experiences may be coordinated.

<sup>54</sup>Jonathan Schaffer also uses examples involving connoisseurs. I will discuss these kinds of examples further when I examine his view.

<sup>55</sup>In conversation, Tonya Manucharova provided me with an example that is an even better illustration of a how a person could change her mind without acquiring a new taste experience. Her example shows that someone who has lost her sense of taste can nonetheless agree that an item is tasty on the basis of testimonial evidence. Manucharova's example is especially interesting because, in this case, there isn't even the possibility that the person can acquire a new taste experience.

Donovan: You're wrong; it isn't tasty. And everyone I know agrees with me.

#### 2.6.4.2 More than a game: Substantive taste disagreements

In the examples I've listed above, the behavior of the conversational participants very closely resembles the behavior of participants in objective disagreements. However, the resemblance is hard to explain if there is no objective matter of fact as to what is tasty, no objective standard that determines how we ought to coordinate. If MacFarlane's explanation is correct, the disagreements above are at worst irrational and at best merely a game with pragmatic value as the goal. MacFarlane admits as much when he says,

From lofty philosophical heights, the language games we play with words like 'funny' and 'likely' may seem irrational. But that is no reason to deny that we do play these games, or that they have a social purpose.<sup>56</sup>

All things considered, we should avoid endorsing a theory according to which much of our linguistic behavior turns out to be irrational. Furthermore, in the case of tastes, we have good reason not to endorse such a theory. Our behavior in these disagreements seems far from a game that has certain social benefits as an end. Instead, our behavior seems reasoned and systematic, and we have every reason to think these are substantive disputes. The cases I have listed above demonstrate that we are sometimes interested in discovering what the tastes of the conversational participants *should* be. Recognizing the existence of a normative aspect to taste disagreements that is connected to something other than pragmatic value can help explain cases of substantive taste disagreements.<sup>57</sup> It explains the seemingly systematic way in which

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<sup>56</sup>MacFarlane, 2007, p. 22.

<sup>57</sup>By saying that there is a 'normative aspect' to taste disagreements, I do not mean to say that every taste disagreement has both a normative and a descriptive aspect. Instead, I am saying that taste disagreements can be normative, descriptive, or both normative and descriptive.

we try to accomplish the coordination of our taste perspectives. It explains why we offer evidence designed to change our interlocutor's minds, and why retraction is sometimes appropriate. From all of this, it becomes clear that in order to solve the Problem of Talking Past, we must give an account of what grounds the normative aspect of taste disagreements.

### 2.6.4.3 Irresolvable disagreement

Before I conclude, I want to address one possible objection to the idea of a normative aspect to taste. At first, it may seem strange to think that there could be a normative aspect to taste. After all, if we really believed that there is such a thing as what an item should taste like, then why are so many of our disagreements about taste irresolvable? In fact, I think that recognizing the existence of a normative aspect to disagreement can help explain why some disagreements seem irresolvable.<sup>58</sup>

Sometimes a disagreement isn't easily settled, or appears irresolvable, because neither participant feels that he or she has been given sufficient reason to change his or her mind. These kinds of "standoffs" can occur for several reasons. One reason that conversational participants might find themselves in a standoff situation is that neither party has offered evidence to back up his or her claim. Many of the cases Stephenson examines are cases in which neither person provides any evidence for his taste claim. However, standoffs can also occur when the participants realize that they are "gustatory peers"—that they have a similar level of expertise or experience. For instance, in (76) Josephine and Jacqueline are both scotch connoisseurs at a gathering of the scotch club.

(46) Josephine: Macallan 21 is tasty. It's so round and smooth!

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<sup>58</sup>The fact that disagreements about taste often seem irresolvable could account for some of our intuitions about the faultlessness of taste disagreements.

Jacqueline: That's false. Macallan 21 is not tasty. It may be round and smooth, but it lacks interest and character!

If Josephine and Jacqueline know that they are both experts about scotch—that they are “gustatory peers”—then it could be that neither of them has reason to defer to the other. In that case, their debate could go on indefinitely. Something similar may be going on with Ed and I in (105). If Ed and I both know that neither one of us is an expert, then neither one of us has reason to defer to the other until we have been given further evidence for or against the tastiness of Budweiser.

The existence of irresolvable disagreement should not dissuade us from recognizing a normative aspect to disagreements about taste. Rather, it should convince us that disagreements about taste are often more complex than they first appear to be.<sup>59</sup>

## 2.7 Conclusion

Solving the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement requires an explanation of how disagreement can be appropriate given that propositional or utterance truth is relative to a judge. I've argued that both MacFarlane and Stephenson go part of the way to explaining the purpose of taste disagreements, but neither of them fully explains normative taste disagreements. I claimed that appealing to epistemic norms helps explain the normative cases of disagreement involving epistemic modals. I went on to argue that there are many cases of substantive taste disagreements that mirror cases of epistemic modal disagreement. I concluded that the best way to explain these cases was to recognize a normative aspect to taste disagreement.

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<sup>59</sup>From the examples I've given, we might be tempted to draw the conclusion that the norms involved in taste disagreement are just epistemic norms. Although I do think there are epistemic norms in play in gustatory disagreements, I think that appealing to epistemic norms will not explain all cases of faultless disagreement. In chapter 3, I will argue that this is because, in some cases of taste disagreement, there is no fact of the matter as to who is right. From this, I conclude that we must articulate a theory of distinctively gustatory norms, which is the project I take on in chapter 4.

However, pointing to the existence of norms for taste won't help explain the purpose of substantive taste disagreements unless we can say more about these norms. For instance, what underlies the normative aspect of disagreements about taste? Who counts as a gustatory expert, and what determines gustatory peerhood? So far, I haven't said. Could it be that the norms in question are just regular epistemic norms?<sup>60</sup> Could they be, contrary to what I've suggested above, merely pragmatic norms? Or could it be that there are special *gustatory norms* in play? So far, I've only argued that we behave linguistically as if there is a normative aspect to disagreements about taste. I have not committed myself to any particular thesis about what underlies this normative aspect. The fact that there is a normative aspect to the way we talk about taste doesn't commit us to the existence of "gustatory norms" in any robust sense. For instance, it could be that, although we behave as if there are gustatory norms, they don't exist. Furthermore, even if we do acknowledge the existence of gustatory norms, we are not yet committed to any particular view about their nature. For instance, we need not be decided as to whether gustatory norms are objective or subjective, absolute or relative, natural or conventional, and so on. I believe such questions must be answered before we can have a complete explanation of disagreement about taste. For instance, we must explain the nature of this normative aspect before we explain why it would be in our interest to coordinate our taste perspectives. In chapter 4, I will explore the normative aspect of taste, including the possible existence and nature of gustatory norms. I will also explore the relation between gustatory norms and epistemic norms. However, before I do, I will examine a sophisticated and flexible version of contextualism developed by Jonathan Schaffer called 'meaning perspectivalism' to see if it can address the Problem of Talking Past. I

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<sup>60</sup>I think that epistemic norms explain some normative cases of epistemic disagreements. As I will explain in chapter 4, I think epistemic disagreements can be driven by other norms as well: pragmatic, moral, etc.

will argue that, like hybrid relativism and radical relativism, meaning perspectivalism has trouble explaining the normative aspect of taste disagreements.



## CHAPTER 3

### SOPHISTICATED CONTEXTUALISM

#### 3.1 Introduction

In chapter 1, I argued that relativists and contextualists about predicates of personal taste are in a standoff with regard to taste disagreement because each side has problems with capturing the purpose of taste disagreements. I named the problem for relativism “The Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement” and the problem for contextualism “The Problem of Talking Past.” In chapter 2, I asked whether this standoff could be resolved in favor of relativism by looking at more sophisticated versions of the view. I considered a radical form of relativism developed by John Macfarlane, and a hybrid of contextualism and relativism promoted by Tamina Stephenson. I claimed that, although each of these views went part of the way in addressing the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement, these solutions were incomplete without an explanation of the normative aspect of taste disagreements. In this chapter I will explore whether it is possible for the standoff to be resolved in favor of contextualism by a more sophisticated contextualist theory—one that explicitly addresses the Problem of Talking Past. The problem is whether contextualists can explain the faultlessness apparent in examples like (105), while still maintaining that the participants were involved in a genuine disagreement (as opposed to some kind of unfortunately perpetuated misunderstanding).

(47) Sam: Is there anything good on tap?

Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all! Guinness, though—now that's tasty.

One of the strongest and most substantial answers to the problem of talking past comes in the form of a subtle kind of contextualism, developed by Jonathan Schaffer, called *meaning perspectivalism*. In this chapter, I will examine both the strengths and the weaknesses of Schaffer's account. In chapter 2, I pointed out that one of the weaknesses of both Stephenson's and MacFarlane's accounts was that they seemed to capture intuitive data generated from considering overly simplistic examples of taste disagreement. Schaffer's theory does not suffer to the same extent in this regard because he has taken great pains to consider a wide range of complex taste disagreements. Nonetheless, I will argue that, like Stevenson and MacFarlane's theories, Schaffer's theory cannot completely explain taste disagreements without an explanation of the normative aspect of taste disagreement.

### 3.2 Jonathan Schaffer: Meaning Perspectivalism

Jonathan Schaffer argues for a flexible sort of contextualism, which he dubs “Meaning Perspectivalism.” Schaffer's view resembles a baseline contextualism in the sense that predicates of personal taste are two-place predicates of the form ‘tasty *to x*.’ However, the second argument place represents an experiencer argument that is filled in by context when it is not explicit. What is unique about Schaffer's account is that it is not paired with a rule that specifies whose perspective is relevant in each case. Instead, context supplies an experiencer argument in a “non-constant way.”<sup>1</sup> Context does not supply hard-and-fast rules that determine whose taste is relevant; rather, certain contextual cues make it more likely that a certain interpretation is intended or conveyed. However, Schaffer says he suspects that the default setting is either to the speaker by way of a covert *de se* pronoun *PRO*, or to the typical

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<sup>1</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 209.

person by way of a covert generic pronoun  $PRO_{ARB}$ , but that contextual cues can override the default settings. As we will see in section 3.4.1.3, on certain versions of Schaffer’s view, the answer to the question ‘Whose tastes are relevant?’ can change even within a given context. In addition to offering a semantic account of predicates of personal taste, Schaffer offers a parallel semantics of epistemic modals. Because it doesn’t seem that there are any important asymmetries between his account of epistemic modals and predicates of personal taste with regard to his solution to the Problem of Talking Past, I will not discuss his account of epistemic modals.

Schaffer employs a two-step approach in supporting his theory. The first step involves using linguistic tests to establish whether predicates of personal taste contain syntactically real, covert experiencer arguments. The second step involves rethinking the disagreement data and arguing that meaning perspectivalism provides the best explanation of that data. The fact that Schaffer’s theory does not rely solely on disagreement data for support distinguishes him from many other participants in the debate about the semantics of predicates of personal taste. This approach is significant because it points to other ways of establishing the correct semantics of predicates of personal taste besides appealing to disagreement data. In this chapter, I will concentrate on Schaffer’s explanation of the disagreement data. However, I will return to his syntactic arguments in chapter 5, when I consider alternative ways of settling the debate about the semantics of predicates of personal taste.

### **3.3 The Disagreement Data**

Schaffer argues that we have been too quick to think that explaining faultlessness is the only thing—or even the most important thing—that needs to be addressed regarding taste disagreements. Furthermore, he argues that intuitions of faultless disagreement are not as straightforward as they appear. He claims that whether a case like (105) is really an example of faultless disagreement depends a great deal

on the context surrounding it. This includes any larger dialog that may contain the conversation. When we are provided with additional contextual information, or alternative continuations of the dialog, we may not have the intuition that the dialog is faultless. In that case, the goal for a semantics of taste is to explain a wide range of disagreements, not just faultless disagreements. In order to discover which cases elicit intuitions of faultlessness, Schaffer canvasses a variety of taste disagreements and draws attention to the further contextual information surrounding them.

### 3.3.1 Dialogs versus soliloquies

First, Schaffer notes that it seems to matter to our intuitions of faultless disagreement that the disagreements are situated in dialogs. This is because the presence of dialog is part of what fosters the feeling that the participants are in a disagreement at all. In order to demonstrate this point, Schaffer compares dialogs to soliloquies like (48) and (49). In (48), Casey and Jesse are at the bar together, whereas in (49) they are at the bar separately.<sup>2</sup>

(48) Casey [talking to Jesse]: Budweiser is tasty.

Jesse [talking to Casey]: Budweiser isn't tasty! Good thing they have Guinness on tap.

(49) Casey [talking to himself at one end of the bar]: Budweiser is tasty.

Jesse [talking to himself at the other end of the bar]: Budweiser isn't tasty!  
Good thing they have Guinness on tap.

Schaffer suggests that we often have far less of an intuition of disagreement in soliloquies as compared to dialogs. He notes that this difference in intuitions is made even

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<sup>2</sup>Throughout my exposition on Schaffer, I will be using adaptations of Schaffer's examples in order to be consistent with my use of examples in the rest of this chapter. However, I've taken care to keep my examples as close to his as possible.

clearer in cases involving ‘sexy,’ another predicate of personal taste. In (50), Jen sits alone in her room while Jim watches TV in the other room.

(50) Jen [alone, writing in her diary]: Brad Pitt is sexy.

Jim [alone, watching E!]: Brad Pitt is not sexy!

Schaffer says that in a case like this involving two heterosexual adults, we get very little feeling of disagreement. Even if Jim and Jen were to somehow learn about one another’s claims, a dispute would be unlikely to result. Neither party would feel compelled to offer arguments for his or her side, and neither would feel any pressure to coordinate his or her views. Both would simply understand that their sexual preferences differ. There would be nothing more to say on the matter. In fact, Schaffer says, it would be very strange to turn a soliloquy such as (50) into an explicit argument such as (51).

(51) Jen [watching E! with Jim]: Brad Pitt is sexy.

# Jim [watching E! with Jen]: No way, Brad Pitt is not sexy!

Schaffer thinks that Jim would simply not respond this way, and that if he did, he would be at fault in the sense that he did not understand what Jen was trying to get across, or in the sense that he misunderstood how normal heterosexual preferences work.

All of these cases seem to show that dialog is playing a role in generating intuitions of disagreement. If that is the case, this datum must be explained by any semantics of predicates of personal taste.

### 3.3.2 Continuations

Not only does the presence of dialog make a difference to our intuitions about faultless disagreement, but the way in which these dialogs unfold and the context in which they are embedded also make a difference. As I argued in chapter 2, real taste

disagreements often go beyond the anemic dialogs exemplified by (105). Schaffer lays out three main kinds of continuations available to the conversational participants once dialog has begun: entrenchment, retraction, or substantive debate.

### 3.3.2.1 Entrenchment

The first type of continuation Schaffer identifies is entrenchment. Entrenchment occurs when one of the participants retreats to a description of his or her own taste perspective, as in (52).

(52) Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all! Guinness, though—now that's tasty.

Ed: Listen, I was just saying that *I* like it.

Schaffer thinks entrenchment is particularly apt to occur in certain contexts. For instance, it is likely to occur when the discussion is initiated by a question that asks directly about the tastes of one of the participants, as in (53), or where the tastes of one of the participants are particularly relevant, as in (54).<sup>3</sup>

(53) Sam: Hey, Jim, what is your favorite beer?

Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all!

Ed: Listen, I was just saying that *I* like it.

(54) Sam: Hey, Jim, can I get you anything from the bar?

Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all!

Ed: Listen, I was just saying that *I* like it.

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<sup>3</sup>Barbara Partee has also pointed out to me in conversation that setting the context with certain questions makes entrenchment especially appropriate.

Cases like these don't generate the intuition of faultless disagreement because they don't generate the feeling of disagreement at all. In fact, if discussions like these were to continue, it would seem obvious to us that the participants were talking past one another rather than disagreeing.

### 3.3.2.2 Retraction

A second option for continuation is retraction. Schaffer notes that retraction seems particularly likely given certain contexts. For instance, imagine a case like 54, except that Sam prefaces the discussion with a question that concerns the joint tastes of Ed and Jim.

(55) Sam: Hey, guys, I'm going to buy a pitcher of beer. What would the two of you like?

Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all!

Ed: Never mind, I was wrong.<sup>4</sup>

Retraction might also occur in cases in which another individual knows more about our tastes than we do.

(56) Bartender: What would you like?

Bobby: Magic Hat is tasty.

Lesha: Bobby, you got that last time, and you totally regretted it.

Bobby: You're right. Good save on that one.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>To me, it seems that it would also be appropriate in (55) for Ed to respond by entrenching. But Schaffer's point seems to be only that retraction is permissible in this sort of situation, not that it is mandatory or even more likely. This seems especially likely considering one solution that he offers for faultless disagreement that utilizes implicatures, which I discuss below.

<sup>5</sup>Although saying 'You were right' isn't technically a retraction, it seems to fall in the same vein as retraction, since it is a type of deferral. I have included it in the example because I think it needs to be explained alongside traditional cases of retraction.

Furthermore, Schaffer notes that retraction seems especially appropriate in cases in which one of the participants is a recognized expert. For instance, recall 57.

(57) Helen: What kind of wine are you interested in buying?

Jeff: Franzia is tasty.

Helen: Believe me, Franzia is not tasty.

Jeff: Oh, then I guess I was wrong.

In retraction cases, it is hard to get the intuition of faultlessness. After all, one of the participants seems to be admitting that he or she was at fault in some sense.

### 3.3.2.3 Debate

The third type of continuation Schaffer discusses is debate. Schaffer discusses two types of debate: mere denial and substantive debate. Although Schaffer doesn't offer a full characterization of substantive debate, he suggests it is exemplified by cases like (58).

(58) Dave: Starbucks coffee isn't tasty. It is far too acidic, and it lacks richness and complexity.

Mattie: But Starbucks coffee *is* tasty. After all, it is one of the most popular coffees in the world. That many people can't be wrong!

Mere denial, on the other hand, occurs when the participants offer flatfooted denials in the place of reasons, as in (59).<sup>6</sup>

(59) Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all!

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<sup>6</sup>It seems to me that even flatfooted denial can be a kind of substantive debate if one or more of the participants are recognized experts. In that case, the issues of what makes for a substantive debate might be more complicated than Schaffer suggests. I will return to this issue in chapter 4.



Ed: Yes, it is!

Jim: No, it isn't!

Schaffer says that certain contexts seem to foster substantive debate as opposed to mere denial. For instance, he points out that substantive debate is to be expected when one individual is asked to offer her expertise, as in (60), but no one is ready to defer to that individual.

(60) Sam: Mac, you're a beer guy—what do you think of the Dogfishhead 60-Minute IPA?

Mac: It's really tasty.

Brooke: Are you kidding? It isn't tasty at all. It's way too bitter to be a balanced beer.

Mac: But just think about how the fresh hops brighten your palate. Besides, Dogfishhead beer is supposed to be off-centered.

If the conversation continues, the participants will be faced with the same options for how to continue. Brooke could entrench, retract, debate in a substantive way, or offer a flatfooted denial. Mac has the same set of options at every turn. However, if Brooke entrenches, then she and Mac are no longer in a disagreement. If she retracts, then the disagreement is not faultless. In that case, Schaffer thinks, faultless disagreement can only arise if Brooke and Mac are disposed to continue the debate with a series of mere denials.<sup>7</sup> He says, “Only if both sides are in principle disposed to debate forever can any appearance of faultless disagreement arise.”<sup>8</sup> To be clear, Schaffer is not claiming that the fact that both parties are disposed to engage endlessly in a

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<sup>7</sup>Although this passage leaves it open as to what kind of debate, substantive or mere denial, generates faultless disagreement, Schaffer includes a diagram on p. 216 that points to mere denial as the only space for faultless disagreement.

<sup>8</sup>Schaffer, 2009.

series of mere denials will guarantee a faultless disagreement. Instead, he claims that this kind of dialogue is the only sort that has a chance of being faultless.

### 3.4 Explaining the Disagreement Data

In the end, Schaffer thinks, faultless disagreement is only one of many data. In his view, any semantic theory of perspectival terms like predicates of personal taste needs to explain the following six points:

**D1** Why soliloquies produce less of an intuition of disagreement than dialogs

**D2** Why entrenchment is possible, especially in certain contexts

**D3** Why retraction is possible, especially in certain contexts

**D4** Why substantive debate is possible, especially in certain contexts

**D5** Why mere denial is possible, especially in certain contexts

**D6** Why mere denial cases can generate an appearance of faultless disagreement<sup>9</sup>

How can contextualism capture all these data without running into the Problem of Talking Past? Schaffer argues that the Problem of Talking Past really only applies to the simplest versions of contextualism—ones that are inflexible with regard to whose perspective is specified. Schaffer claims that meaning perspectivalism, on the other hand, has a built-in flexibility that allows it to account for meaningful disagreements, including the sorts of disagreements characterized by D1-D6. Furthermore, he claims that because relativism was crafted explicitly to handle simple cases of faultless disagreement and not a wide range of disagreement data, it is not able to accommodate D1-D6.

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<sup>9</sup>Schaffer, 2009 p. 216.

Schaffer's strategy for explaining D1-D6 involves drawing attention to contextual effects in each case. He assumes that these contextual cues suggest whose taste is to be specified in the proposition. Then he suggests that meaning perspectivalism is uniquely equipped to handle this data because it has built-in flexibility with regard to whose perspective is represented by the proposition. He claims that relativism, on the other hand, is in no position to explain any of the data. In section (3.4.1), I will show how Schaffer applies this strategy to D1-D6, and in section 3.5, I will lay out his critique of relativism.

### **3.4.1 Meaning perspectivalism and the disagreement data**

#### **3.4.1.1 Meaning perspectivalism on soliloquies versus dialogs**

Schaffer argues that dialogs play a role in feelings of disagreement in cases like (48) because they affect the context. For instance, the fact that Casey is speaking directly to Jesse makes it more likely that he is intending to report a shared standard rather than his own standard. On the other hand, in a soliloquy such as (49), Casey is not directing his comments to anyone, making it more likely that he is merely intending to report his own taste. This is why it seems strange to turn soliloquies like (49) or (50) into dialogs. If in soliloquies individuals are merely describing their own tastes, then they would end up talking past one another when thrown into a dialog. Sometimes setting the context with a question can make it obvious that the topic of conversation is a shared standard. In (55), Sam asks a question that concerns the joint tastes of Ed and Jim. Ed might have said 'Budweiser is tasty' because he took his own tastes to be representative of the group's tastes. It makes sense, then, that Ed retracts when he discovers that Jim does not share his tastes. Furthermore, if the presence of dialog indicates that there is a shared standard at issue, it might explain why it is so bizarre to turn soliloquies involving 'sexy,' such as (50), into dialogs involving 'sexy,' such as (51). Example (50) is supposed to be a case in which

it is obvious that there is no shared standard. In that case, then, barring a change in the sexual preferences of one of the individuals, it is unlikely that the topic could change from discussing individual standards to discussing a shared standard.

Schaffer claims that meaning perspectivalism is able to accommodate these data, since it allows the experiencer argument to represent different individuals in different contexts. In a soliloquy like (49), Casey and Jesse could be uttering different but compatible propositions. Casey's utterance can mean 'Budweiser is tasty to Casey,' while Jesse's utterance can mean 'Budweiser isn't tasty to Jesse.' However, in a dialog such as (48), Casey and Jesse could be asserting and denying the same proposition—for instance, 'Budweiser is tasty to Casey and Jesse,' 'Budweiser is tasty to everyone in the bar,' or even 'Budweiser is tasty to the average person.'

#### **3.4.1.2 Meaning perspectivalism on entrenchment, retraction, substantive debate, and mere denial**

Of course, not all dialogs concern a shared standard, even if many do. An individual may only have been intending to describe his own preferences, as in (52), in which case entrenchment may work to clarify this intention. In other cases, it is clear from context whose tastes are being discussed. For instance, in both (53) and (54), it is clear that it is Ed's tastes that are at issue, since the context was set with a question that concerned his tastes. That is why entrenchment seems especially appropriate in these two examples. If Ed was only saying, 'Budweiser is tasty to Ed,' then it would be appropriate for him to entrench so as to ensure that he and Jim do not continue to talk past one another.

However, entrenchment is not always the result in cases in which an individual is trying to communicate something about his or her own preferences. Sometimes, someone else may know more about our own tastes than we do. In (56), Bobby may just be saying that 'Magic Hat is tasty to Bobby.' However, in this case Lesha has

a better memory for what Bobby likes than Bobby does, in which case it is more appropriate for Bobby to retract than to entrench.

Someone can be more of an expert than we are about our own tastes. He or she can also be more of an expert about the average person's tastes, or more of an expert about the tastes of experts in a given domain. In (57), for instance, Helen is the recognized expert on wine. Meaning perspectivalism allows that Helen's statement means that 'Franzia is not tasty to the expert.' If Jeff meant 'Franzia is tasty to the expert,' then he would be right to retract after hearing that an expert disagrees with him.

When it is obvious who the expert is, as it is in (57), retraction may be appropriate. When it is unclear who the expert is, a substantive debate can ensue to help determine who has more expertise with regard to the perspective under debate. This may help explain what is going on in (60) and perhaps in (58). In cases in which neither of the participants can articulate reasons for his position, mere denial may be employed in the hopes of accomplishing the same goal. This could be what is happening in (59). In that case, even mere denial cases can be substantive disagreements of sorts. But notice that the fact that denial can be used as a way of having a substantive disagreement means that even cases of mere denial can fail to generate the intuition of faultlessness. For instance, if the person issuing the denial is a recognized expert, then mere denial might be enough to settle the dispute—there may be no need to offer additional evidence.

### **3.4.1.3 Meaning perspectivalism on faultless disagreement**

And what about faultless disagreement? Can meaning perspectivalism explain that? Schaffer says that there are at least three possible approaches that meaning perspectivalism could take for addressing faultless disagreement. First, the meaning perspectivalist could appeal to the distinction I made in chapter 1 between epistemic

fault and other kinds of fault. The meaning perspectivalist could say that a faultless disagreement is merely a case in which neither of the participants is epistemically at fault, even if one of them has said something false. For instance, in 60, Mac might be claiming ‘Dogfishhead is tasty to the expert,’ while Brook might be claiming ‘Dogfishhead is not tasty to the expert.’ In that case, their dialog represents a real disagreement and not just a case of talking past. Assuming there is one right answer as to what is tasty to the expert, at least one of them is wrong. Here, ‘one right answer’ could just mean ‘one right answer at the given context’ rather than ‘one right answer’ simpliciter. However, assuming that both Mac and Brooke made their claims on the basis of what they believed to be good reasons, then neither one of them has been epistemically irresponsible. On this approach, although disagreements about taste describe a perspective, they are nonetheless disagreements about matters of fact. It is either true or false whether Dogfishhead tastes good to a given individual, to people in general, to an expert, and so on. However, like many other disagreements about matters of fact, the truth can be difficult to uncover.<sup>10</sup>

The second option for explaining faultless disagreement is to embrace the baseline-contextualist solution to faultless disagreement while adding a pragmatic solution to the Problem of Talking Past. Recall that the baseline-contextualist explanation of faultless disagreement involved saying that the participants utter different yet compatible propositions about their own taste perspectives. For instance, in (59) the meaning perspectivalist could follow the baseline contextualist and claim that Ed is saying ‘Budweiser is tasty to Ed’ while Jim is saying ‘Budweiser is not tasty to Jim.’ However, in order to escape the charge that Ed and Jim are merely talking past

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<sup>10</sup>Schaffer says, “The opponent of meaning perspectivalism needs to explain how the matter of faultless disagreement relevantly differs from the kind of intractable disputes one finds between [for instance] political partisans concerning what are evidentially matters of objective fact.” I argued for a similar point in a previous version of this chapter, which was written before Schaffer added this passage to his paper. For this reason, there will be some overlap between Schaffer’s account and the one I offer in Chapter 4.

one another, the meaning perspectivalist can claim that the topic of conversation is something other than the propositions Jim and Ed literally utter in the conversation. Instead, it might involve an implicature, or, as Schaffer puts it, some “other matters downstream from the proposition at issue.”<sup>11</sup> For instance, Ed and Jim may be indirectly arguing about what pitcher of beer to order next and using statements about their own tastes as examples for how they should coordinate their ordering. This sort of solution is similar to the one I suggested in chapter 3 for relativism, except that it involves coordinating actions instead of or in addition to coordinating tastes.

A third option is for the meaning perspectivalist to give up the idea that there is a single speech context relevant to determining the content of an utterance and instead allow for a plurality of speech contexts associated with a particular utterance. Schaffer suggests three ways in which the meaning perspectivalist could utilize a plurality of speech contexts. First, there might simply be a determinate plurality of speech contexts, in which case a single utterance will express multiple propositions. Second, there might be a plurality of speech contexts associated with a given utterance, but it could be indeterminate as to which is the correct context in which to interpret the meaning of the utterance.<sup>12</sup> Third, the meaning perspectivalist could take the route suggested by Tamina Stephenson, where there is a unique and determinate speech context, but only relative to a judge.<sup>13</sup> Schaffer doesn't spell out exactly how the plurality-of-contexts approach captures faultless disagreement. It's clear that all three versions of the approach allow for both parties in a taste disagreement to utter true propositions. In that sense, the plurality-of-contexts approach captures the faultless aspect of faultless disagreement. But can it capture the disagreement component

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<sup>11</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 219.

<sup>12</sup>Schaffer points to von Fintel and Gillies as arguing for a view like this in their 2008 paper.

<sup>13</sup>Here Schaffer is only suggesting that the meaning perspectivalist could adopt a semantic strategy like Stephenson's. He does not mention whether the meaning perspectivalist ought to take on Stephenson's pragmatic solution to faultless disagreement.

of faultless disagreement? It seems that unless this approach is augmented, it is still faced with the Problem of Talking Past. Schaffer seems content to let this problem stand, since his solution would at least explain how these cases generate the appearance of disagreement, if not actual disagreements. He offers an example from another domain—the case of singular ‘you’ sentences addressed to multiple people—in which positing a plurality of contexts might be justified in order to explain what appears to be a faultless disagreement.

Thus, imagine that there is a Jesus, who in fact loves Ann but not Ben, and consider:

- (61) Preacher: Jesus loves you.  
Ann [in the audience, feeling beloved]: Yes, that’s true.  
Ben [in the audience next to Ann, feeling nothing]: No, that’s not true.

Ann and Ben seem at least superficially to be in a disagreement, but only because (given context relativism) they are evaluating the preacher’s sentence at different contexts.<sup>14,15</sup>

### 3.5 Schaffer’s Critique of Relativism

Schaffer argues that meaning perspectivalism can explain D1-D5 with ease and that it has a good chance of explaining faultless disagreement. He claims that relativism, on the other hand, is in a very poor position to explain any of these data. Schaffer does not say which kind of relativism he is targeting, but since his paper makes it clear that he is familiar with a variety of relativistic views, we can assume he means that no version of relativism can adequately explain the disagreement data. He says,

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<sup>14</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 220.

<sup>15</sup>Schaffer uses ‘context relativism’ to refer to the kind of view I attribute to Stephenson, which is a kind of contextualism that utilizes a judge parameter.



I will now argue that such an approach fails to explain any of D1-D5 and has even worse prospects for providing a principled explanation of D5-D6. This is nearly a worst-case result.<sup>16</sup>

First, Schaffer claims that relativism cannot explain the difference between dialogs and soliloquies. Relativists contend that perspective-neutral propositions are at issue in all disagreements about taste. In that case, they will treat both (48) and (49) as full-fledged disagreements without offering us any insight into why we get a stronger intuition of disagreement with (48). Even worse, relativism can give no explanation for why (50) does not seem to be a case of faultless disagreement at all. In that case, relativism does not have any room for the special role that dialog plays in taste disagreements.

Second, Schaffer writes that relativism will have difficulty explaining entrenchment. Because what is at issue in a dialog like (52) is a perspective-neutral proposition, how can it be appropriate for Ed to entrench? If Ed brings up something about his own taste perspective, it seems that Jim could just accuse him of switching the topic. And yet entrenchment does seem appropriate, especially in cases like (53) and (54), where the context is set with a question that concerns Ed's tastes. However, relativism will have no explanation for why entrenchment is especially appropriate in such cases because, according to relativism, the topic of conversation is always a perspective-neutral proposition—not a proposition concerning anyone's individual taste perspective.

Third, Schaffer argues that relativism cannot truly explain retraction. True, a radical relativist framework like MacFarlane's can semantically permit retraction, but can it explain the motivation for it? For instance, in (55), when Ed says 'Budweiser is tasty,' he is expressing a perspective-neutral proposition—not something about the

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<sup>16</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 220.

joint tastes of him and Jim. Because Ed's tastes haven't radically changed during the discussion—Budweiser is still tasty to Ed—it's unclear from the perspective of relativism why he should retract what he said. Furthermore, Schaffer says, relativism offers us no explanation for why retraction is more appropriate in some contexts than others. In (55), it seems clear that the fact that Sam asks Ed and Jim a question about their joint tastes motivates Ed's retraction. However, because relativism makes no allowance for context to determine the content of the proposition, it cannot account for this contextual effect.

Finally, Schaffer claims that relativism cannot explain either substantive debate or mere denial. Again, although relativism allows semantically for substantive debate and mere denial, it is unclear what motivation conversational participants could have for either. Here Schaffer essentially raises the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement. What reason could there be for an individual to deny a taste-neutral proposition when the taste parameters are set differently? Far from explaining why mere denial leads to the appearance of faultless disagreement as per D6, relativism has trouble explaining how these cases even constitute genuine disagreements. Even more mysterious are substantive debates. What use is there in offering substantive evidence if truth is relative to a perspective? If truth is relative to a taste perspective, then what more is there to say when we find out that our tastes differ? Furthermore, relativism seems to have no explanation for why substantive debate is more likely when there is an explicit appeal to an expert, as in (60). After all, according to relativism, the propositions directly uttered by the participants are perspective neutral; they don't directly describe the tastes of the expert.

### **3.6 Critique of Schaffer's Account**

Schaffer offers some very convincing explanations of the disagreement data on behalf of meaning perspectivalism. However, I think Schaffer may be wrong to claim

that relativism fares worse than meaning perspectivalism in this regard. I will argue that relativism has equal prospects for explaining the data. In many cases, relativism can employ the very same type of strategies that Schaffer does on behalf of meaning perspectivalism. If this is true, then meaning perspectivalism doesn't appear to have any advantage over relativism with regard to disagreement. Furthermore, I will argue that, as with Stephenson's account, Schaffer's explanation only captures the descriptive aspect of disagreement about taste and epistemic modals, and that, as it stands, it does not capture the normative aspect of disagreement.

In this section, I will argue that although Schaffer is right to think that contextual features play an important role in explaining D1-D6, he is wrong in thinking that the role they play is to suggest whose tastes are to be specified in the proposition. I will argue that instead, context plays a role in determining the purpose or topic of a taste disagreement, of which there can be many. I claim that information about the purpose or topic of the conversation is what drives our intuitions in D1-D6. Because of this, I argue that Schaffer is mistaken to think that the only, or even best, way to incorporate contextual effect is for it to be reflected directly in the semantics.

### **3.6.1 Critique of Schaffer: dialogs versus soliloquies**

I will begin my critique by considering Schaffer's explanation of the contextual effects generated by dialogs versus soliloquies. Schaffer says, "There is far less of a feeling of disagreement in [soliloquy] cases than in their dialog counterparts."<sup>17</sup> First, we should ask whether Schaffer is right about this difference and whether he is right that the presence of dialog is responsible for it. Second, if this difference exists, we should ask whether Schaffer is right that meaning perspectivalism can explain it while relativism cannot. I will claim that Schaffer is right that the presence of dialog affects the context. However, I will argue that it affects the context by helping to

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<sup>17</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 212.

make clear the topic or purpose of the utterance/conversation, and not necessarily by determining what is literally said.

What Schaffer's cases show is that some dialogs foster a stronger intuition of disagreement than some soliloquies. However, I think he might be mistaken about the extent of the contrast between dialogs and soliloquies. In particular, these intuitions are not generalizable to all pairs of dialogs and soliloquies. This is because the presence of dialog itself is not solely responsible for the fact that we have stronger intuitions about certain examples. Rather, it is primarily a difference in conversational topic or purpose that explains why we have stronger intuitions about certain cases.

What is it about dialog that Schaffer believes demands explanation? Speaking of cases of faultless disagreement like (105), Schaffer says,

What the various soliloquy cases show is that dialogue is playing a role in our intuitions of disagreement in... [(105)]. In particular, it matters that [Ed] is speaking *to Jim*, and it matters that [Jim] is replying *to Ed*, and is prefacing his reply with a 'no.' This needs explanation.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.6.1.1 Two senses of disagreement

However, we do not need to appeal to semantic theory to explain the fact that it matters that Ed is speaking directly to Jim and that Jim responds directly to Ed by using 'no.' To see why, it will be helpful to distinguish between two kinds of intuitions involving disagreement. We can think of disagreement as either a state or an activity.<sup>19</sup> As the name suggests, disagreement in the activity sense involves participants who are actively engaged in a dispute. Disagreement in the state sense, on the other hand, involves individuals who hold incompatible views. At this point, I am being deliberately vague about what it means to disagree in the state sense. This

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<sup>18</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 212.

<sup>19</sup>Several philosophers have noted this kind of distinction. For instance, see Dreier, 2009.

is an important meta-ethical question that deserves more attention than I can give it here. For now, I'll leave it open whether it means believing contradictory propositions, having incompatible planning states, or even, as I will suggest in chapter 3, having incompatible tastes, and so on. Disagreement in the state sense can arise even in cases where both individuals are unaware of the other's views. For instance, we can say, "Winston Churchill and Tony Blair disagree about foreign policy" even though these two men can never actively participate in a conversation with one another.<sup>20</sup> It seems that the intuition of disagreement in the state sense is at work in eavesdropping cases like (62).

(62) Grandma: Liverwurst is so tasty that I'm going to make liverwurst sandwiches for myself.

Luke: Maybe we should go in and join Grandma for lunch. She says liverwurst is tasty.

Max: Believe me, that's false! Liverwurst is not tasty.

Arguably, in eavesdropping cases, the participants are not directly addressing one another, and yet many of us still have an intuition of disagreement in these cases.

We can elicit an intuition of disagreement in the state sense in other cases by providing additional context. Imagine in (63) that Casey and Jesse are preparing to vote for the tastiest beer at the bar, but neither of them is aware of how the other is voting.

(63) Casey [talking to himself about his vote]: Budweiser is tasty.

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<sup>20</sup>However, I think we can get an intuition of disagreement in the activity sense in cases in which the participants are actively but indirectly conversing with one another. For instance, I take it that examples in which individuals argue through correspondence, respond to one another's work by way of publication, and so on may elicit intuitions of disagreement in the activity sense in addition to disagreement in the state sense.

Jesse [talking to himself about his vote]: Budweiser isn't tasty! Good thing they have Guinness on tap.

Are Casey and Jesse involved in a disagreement? No. Do Casey and Jesse disagree? My inclination is to say 'yes.' If this is the case, then it is not that soliloquies cannot foster intuitions of disagreement; they just foster intuitions of a different kind.

Dialogs like (48) can give rise to intuitions of disagreement in the activity sense, but there is no mystery as to how or why. Disagreement in the activity sense necessarily involves individuals who are in conversation with one another. That is why, in (105), it matters that Ed is speaking *to Jim*, and it matters that Jim is replying *to Ed*, and is prefacing his reply with a 'no'—that is just what it means to be engaged in the activity of disagreement. But this feature has nothing to do with the semantics of taste predicates, and it is completely compatible with relativism. Naturally, we will have stronger intuitions of disagreement in cases in which individuals are engaged in the activity of disagreement as well as being in a state of disagreement.

What does need explanation is the fact that both soliloquies and dialogs can produce an intuition of disagreement in the state sense. In fact, it may be more pressing for us to explain disagreement in the state sense, since it is what often drives disagreement in the activity sense. Relativism has equal if not better prospects for explaining examples that generate the intuition of disagreement in the state sense, because the individuals involved believe contradictory propositions. However, this explanation is not immediately available to the meaning perspectivalist because, according to her, the propositions involved in taste disagreements are perspective specific.

### 3.6.1.2 Soliloquies into dialogs

For now, let's put aside the discussion of disagreement in the state sense and return to Schaffer's arguments. Perhaps there is more to Schaffer's point about the difference between soliloquies and dialogs than the fact that dialogs involve direct

discourse and the use of ‘no.’ Schaffer claims that it is significant that soliloquies are not easily turned into dialogs without loss of the intuition of disagreement. In support of this point, he offers examples like (51), in which it seems ridiculous to imagine turning soliloquies into dialogs wherein it would be natural for the participants to offer substantive reasons.<sup>21</sup> He insists that this is unexpected according to relativism. If relativism were true, then soliloquies like (50) should easily turn into dialogs (and furthermore, into disagreements), because the same perspective-neutral propositions are at issue in either case.<sup>22</sup>

In a moment, I will argue that there are cases in which soliloquies can easily turn into dialogs—even into disagreements. I will claim that even cases involving ‘sexy’ can generate a sense of disagreement. Why can some soliloquies be easily turned into dialogs while some cannot? Why do some cases involving ‘sexy’ generate an intuition of disagreement while some do not? Why does (51) in particular not generate an intuition of faultlessness? The answer has nothing to do with an inherent difference between dialogs and soliloquies. Instead, a different factor is at work in these examples. In particular, I suggest that what we, as readers of these examples, assume to be the conversational purpose or topic of the conversation explains why we have stronger

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<sup>21</sup>It is somewhat difficult to follow Schaffer’s arguments involving ‘sexy.’ Schaffer starts the section on dialog by arguing that dialogs produce stronger intuitions of disagreement than their soliloquy counterparts, from which he concludes that dialog must be playing a role in our intuitions about disagreement. However, he then moves to cases involving ‘sexy,’ in which we are supposed to have the intuition that neither the soliloquy nor its dialog counterpart are disagreements. This would seem to suggest that dialog is not what makes the difference in our intuitions about disagreement. I think the best way to interpret Schaffer here is to say that he thinks that dialogs do not necessarily affect our intuitions about disagreement, but they sometimes do because they affect the topic or purpose of the conversation or utterance. However, if we take this route, it is clear that it is the purpose or topic of conversation that matters to our intuitions about disagreement, and this is something that relativism can easily accommodate.

<sup>22</sup>In reading this section of Schaffer’s article, I’ve noticed that he sometimes treats ‘dialog’ as interchangeable with ‘disagreement.’ He starts out by arguing that soliloquies cannot be successfully turned into dialogs, but then concludes that soliloquies cannot be successfully turned into disagreements. Because part of the issue here is to determine whether soliloquies can produce an intuition of disagreement, we run the risk of begging the question by treating ‘dialog’ as a synonym for ‘disagreement.’ I take it that Schaffer’s real point is that soliloquies cannot easily be turned into disagreements (or rather, dialogs that produce an intuition of disagreement).

intuitions about (48) than (49). It also explains why some soliloquies can turn into disagreements in the active sense, and why (51) clearly doesn't seem like a case of faultless disagreement. While Schaffer artfully manipulates and controls the conversational topic or purpose in his examples, he stops short of explicitly acknowledging that these factors are what drive many of our intuitions about the cases.

### **3.6.1.3 The role of the conversational topic and purpose**

Informally, we can think of the topic of a conversation or remark as representing what the conversation or remark is about, and the purpose of a conversation as the reason the conversation takes place. I am using 'reason' here to refer to the goal(s) the participants are aiming for. I am not taking it to refer to what caused the conversation to take place. I will assume that participants can have a variety of conversational goals and that these goals can be either implicit or explicit.

When we read linguistic examples like the ones Schaffer presents, unless we are given additional contextual information, we have to make assumptions about the conversational topic or purpose. Such assumptions can make a difference in our intuitions about disagreement. In a soliloquy, we often assume that the purpose of someone's remark is to express or describe the person's preferences. After all, there is no one else around (at least that the person is aware of) to argue with. If we assume that the purpose of Casey's and Jesse's statements is to express or describe their own tastes, then of course it will seem strange if we try to imagine turning these soliloquies into dialogs. Obviously, in such cases there is little reason for Jesse to offer arguments or to resolve any difference of opinion (unless Jesse and Casey have another purpose for the conversation in addition to expressing or describing their preferences, which of course they may). However, we can easily imagine a case in which it is stipulated that the purpose of Casey and Jesse's utterances was something other than or in addition



to expressing or describing their own tastes. Imagine that Casey and Jesse are each privately preparing for a debate about the merits of mass-produced beer.

(64) Casey [practicing his opening statement aloud]: Budweiser is tasty.

Jesse [practicing his opening statement aloud]: Budweiser isn't tasty!

In this sort of situation, we can get an intuition of disagreement even with the soliloquies. Furthermore, it is not difficult to imagine Casey and Jesse's soliloquies turning into a dialog—and not only a dialog but also a disagreement. Furthermore, it would not at all seem strange for Jesse and Casey to follow up their opening statements by offering reasons, as in (65).

(65) Casey [practicing his opening statement aloud]: Budweiser is tasty. It is light, crisp, and has mass appeal.

Jesse [practicing his opening statement aloud]: Budweiser isn't tasty! It lacks complexity and only appeals to an unrefined palate.

Another point that bears noting is that it seems possible for dialogs to turn into soliloquies—ones that produce an intuition of disagreement. In (66), Casey broods at home after returning from arguing with Jesse at the bar.

(66) Casey [alone, remembering the earlier conversation with Jesse]: Budweiser is tasty! It is so cool and refreshing. Jesse has no idea what he's talking about!

To me, this example generates at least a hint of an intuition of disagreement in the activity sense—although perhaps a residual one—as well as an intuition of disagreement in the state sense. It does this because there is still a shadow of the purpose of Casey and Jesse's original conversation present in Casey's soliloquy.

#### 3.6.1.4 Description and expression

In many of the cases I have described, the purpose of the conversation or remark is something other than describing someone's preferences. For instance, in (64) the purpose of each soliloquy is to prepare for a debate. In that case, it is not surprising that this soliloquy can be turned into a dialogue. But what about soliloquies in which the purpose of the utterance was to express or describe someone's tastes? Even soliloquies that are sparked by the intention to describe an individual's tastes can easily be turned into dialogs. This is because it is clearly possible for a conversation to undergo a change of topic or purpose. For instance, we could have a case in which two individuals go from describing their own tastes to discussing a shared standard, as in (67).

(67) Casey [talking to himself at one end of the bar]: Budweiser is tasty.

Jesse [talking to himself at the end of the bar]: Budweiser isn't tasty! Good thing they have Guinness on tap.

Bartender [talking to everyone at the bar]: I'll buy everyone a round of the same beer. What would you folks like?

Casey [talking to everyone at the bar]: Budweiser is tasty.

Jesse [talking to everyone at the bar]: No way! Budweiser isn't tasty!

More interestingly, we could have a case in which two individuals go from describing their own tastes to engaging in a debate about what someone's tastes ought to be.

(68) Casey [talking to himself at one end of the bar]: Budweiser is tasty.

Jesse [after overhearing Casey]: You're so wrong. Budweiser isn't tasty!

Jesse: Hey, I was just saying that *I* liked it.

Casey: I know, but what are you thinking? Budweiser is completely tasteless!

It seems clear that even cases in which the aim of the utterance was to express or describe an individual's preference can turn into a substantive disagreement in which reasons are offered. Why should we argue with someone who was merely expressing a preference? If, as I suggested in chapter 2, one purpose of a taste disagreement is for the group to coordinate tastes, then it makes sense for Jesse to argue with Casey, even if Casey originally intended simply to express or describe his own tastes.

### 3.6.1.5 'Sexy'

The same issue of conversational purpose or topic, and not an inherent difference between dialogs and soliloquies, is responsible for our intuitions about examples involving 'sexy.' As I've suggested in the first half of this chapter, the purpose of many taste disagreements is for the individuals to coordinate their tastes. We get weaker intuitions of disagreement in cases like (51) than in cases like (48) because it is assumed that the participants can't coordinate their tastes. Knowing this, it is natural to assume that the topic or purpose of each soliloquy is merely for the individuals to express or describe their own preferences. This explains why it would seem strange to turn the soliloquy into a dialog in which Jim uses 'no.' If Jim contradicts Jen, then he has missed the point of Jen's utterance.<sup>23</sup> It also explains why we don't expect the individuals to offer reasons for their positions. Sometimes when we are trying to communicate something about our preferences, we offer reasons for our positions so as to help our interlocutor better understand what things are like from our perspective. However, the need to offer reasons in such cases is less pressing than it is in cases where the goal is to change our interlocutor's mind.

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<sup>23</sup>However, as I think example (68) shows, it is possible for Jim to say 'no' if he makes it clear that he is changing topics or demanding that Jen back up her preferences. I think examples like these are most natural when there is a shift in topic or purpose from the descriptive/expressive to the normative.

However, it is not difficult to override these assumptions by changing the details of the example or by additional context. Clearly, if we assumed that Jim was a homosexual man, it would be easy to turn (51) into a dialog about which we have intuitions of faultless disagreement.

(69) Jen: Brad Pitt is sexy. I would marry him in a heartbeat.

Jim: I can't see what you see in Brad Pitt; he isn't sexy at all. Give me a tall, dark, and handsome man any day.

We can even get an intuition of faultless disagreement in cases in which Jim and Jen are two heterosexual adults. In (70), Jim and Jen are both heterosexual adults discussing who should be voted *People* magazine's Sexiest Man Alive.<sup>24</sup>

(70) Jen: Brad Pitt is sexy. He is so classically handsome and easygoing!

Jim: No way, Brad Pitt is not sexy! He has too much of a 'boy next door' look about him. Johnny Depp—now there is a sexy guy.

In (70), it seems that Jim and Jen are at least trying to coordinate their opinions, if not their tastes. This makes it possible to get an intuition of disagreement—even an intuition of faultless disagreement. Perhaps they are trying to coordinate their opinions about what Jen ought to find sexy, or perhaps they are trying to coordinate their beliefs about what the majority of people find sexy. What matters for now is that they seem to be trying to coordinate, and that is what helps facilitate the intuition of disagreement.

### 3.6.1.6 Should this data be accounted for by the semantics?

All of these cases make it clear that what is mainly responsible for our intuitions is the purpose of the soliloquy or dialog, not the mere fact that it is a soliloquy or

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<sup>24</sup>Kölbel argues that there are cases involving 'sexy' that generate intuitions of faultless disagreement. For instance, Kölbel uses dialogs involving 'sexy' in his 2008 paper as the primary example of faultless disagreement. I have used his examples as a basis for mine.

dialog. So the real question is, which semantic account can accommodate the fact that conversations about taste have a variety of topics and purposes? It is reasonable to think that Schaffer is aware of the role that conversational purpose or topic plays in our intuitions, since he so artfully controls these factors in his examples. The problem is that he assumes that the differences in conversational topic or purpose between dialogs and soliloquies have to be represented semantically. In other words, he assumes that if the purpose of Casey's soliloquy such as (49) is for Casey to describe his tastes, then his utterance must literally refer to his tastes. However, there is no reason to assume that this contextual feature must be directly reflected in the semantics. What is driving the difference in intuitions is a pragmatic factor, not a semantic one. Furthermore, it is a factor that relativism can accommodate. First, as I have argued in the first half of this paper, a relativist semantics is easily paired with a pragmatic strategy that recognizes that the purpose of many dialogs is to coordinate tastes. This would explain why we get less of a feeling of intuition of disagreement in soliloquies like (49), where the presumption is that individuals have no one to coordinate with; or in (50), in which coordination would be impossible were they to enter into a dialog. It also makes sense of soliloquy cases such as (64) and (65), in which the purpose is to prepare for coordination, or (66), in which the purpose is to reflect on a failed coordination attempt.

It also explains cases like (67), in which the purpose of the debate is to coordinate actions or outcomes, if not tastes. In (67), we don't need to assume that the individuals are literally describing what is tasty to the group. Perhaps the real topic of the conversation is, as Schaffer says, "something downstream from the proposition." In this case, let us suppose that the purpose is to determine what sort of beer ought to be served. The tastes of the group are relevant to this issue, but this doesn't mean that the debate is actually about the tastes of the group. Of course, relativism can also allow that this is a debate about the tastes of the group. It could always

be that the proposition downstream from the perspective-neutral proposition is a perspective-specific proposition. The point is that there are many options available to the relativist as to what the conversation is about, other than the proposition being literally expressed. This is good news, because it seems that we could have a debate about what beer ought to be served without its being a debate about what everyone likes, as in (71).

(71) Bartender [talking to everyone at the bar]: I'll buy everyone a round of the same beer. What would you folks like?

Casey [thinking of everyone at the bar]: Budweiser is tasty.

Jesse [thinking only of himself]: No way, Budweiser isn't tasty! I know everyone likes it, but they shouldn't. So let's get a better beer.

If Schaffer is right, then Casey should be able to accuse Jesse of switching topics, because according to contextualism Jesse and Casey's conversation means something along the lines of (72):

(72) Bartender [talking to everyone at the bar]: I'll buy everyone a round of the same beer. What would you folks like?

Casey [thinking of everyone at the bar]: Budweiser is tasty [to everyone at the bar].

Jesse [thinking only of himself]: No way, Budweiser isn't tasty [to Jesse]! I know everyone likes it, but I think they should try something better.

But clearly, Jesse is not changing the topic. He is just stating that there are considerations other than what everyone likes that are relevant to determining what beer should be served.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>One option for Schaffer is to state that Jesse is using his own tastes as a model for what everyone should like, in which case Jesse is not switching topics. I think this is just what the meaning perspectivalist ought to say, and I will talk more about this option in chapter 5, after I have given an account of gustatory norms in chapter 4.

Furthermore, nothing stops the relativist from acknowledging that conversations or utterances can have purposes other than coordination. In particular, relativism can also explain cases in which the purpose of the soliloquy or dialog is for the individuals to express or describe their personal preferences. According to relativism, Casey's utterance in (49) literally means 'Budweiser is tasty.' However, if we assume that taste claims are often made on the basis of what the individual believes is tasty (though they may be subject to revision upon gaining further evidence), then Casey can also voice his claim with the goal of expressing or describing his own tastes.

The relativist can also accommodate cases in which the purpose of the conversation is to say something about the tastes of a specific person, the tastes of the group of conversational participants, and the tastes of normal people. Again, she simply needs to make use of the same sort of pragmatic strategy Schaffer employs on behalf of contextualism to accommodate faultless disagreement and say that there is a difference between what the debate is about and what propositions are literally being uttered. Perhaps there are problems with this strategy in general, but because it is the same one Schaffer employs on behalf of contextualism, he cannot deny it to the relativist.

### **3.6.2 Critique of Schaffer: entrenchment**

#### **3.6.2.1 Relativism and retraction**

Is Schaffer right that contextualists have the edge over relativists with regard to entrenchment? Is it true, as Schaffer suggests, that entrenchment would be inappropriate if the participants assert perspective-neutral propositions? Perhaps not. Relativists do not have to assume that the topic of the conversation is always a perspective-neutral proposition, nor do they have to assume that the purpose of the conversation is to debate perspective-neutral propositions. Again, for now let us assume that individuals, whether rightly or wrongly, often use first-person experience

as the grounds for taste claims. In that case, in (52) Ed could be using a perspective-neutral proposition to convey information about what things are like from his own taste perspective. This aim is especially likely if Ed's utterance is a response to a direct question about his tastes, as in (53); or is a response to a question to which Ed's tastes are relevant, as in (54). It is the topic or purpose of the conversation that determines when it is appropriate to entrench, and not what the participants are literally saying. This point is evidenced by the fact that cases like (73) seem perfectly natural.

(73) Jim: Budweiser is tasty.

Ed: No, it isn't.

Jim: I was just saying that I like it.

Ed: Well, that's not what you said; you said it was tasty—now you're confusing me.

Jim: Jeez, you take everything so literally! I know what I said, but I just meant to let you know that I liked it. Next time I'll just say that.

This example will be difficult for the meaning perspectivalist to explain if he or she insists that the topic of the conversation must always be what is literally said, because on her account what Jim literally said was 'Budweiser is tasty to Jim.'

### 3.6.2.2 Change of topic—descriptive to normative

Furthermore, there are other reasons why the meaning perspectivalist ought to allow that the purpose and topic of a conversation is not always directly reflected in the semantics. For instance, consider (68), in which individuals go from describing their own tastes to engaging in a debate about what someone's tastes ought to be. Casey's response to Jesse seems entirely appropriate. Yet if Jesse's utterance in (68) is just a description of Jesse's tastes, and if the topic of the debate can only be about what Jesse literally said, then Casey's response would be entirely inappropriate.



Again, if it is all right for contextualists to recognize that the topic of conversation is something other than what is literally uttered—and that what individuals communicate sometimes diverges from what they literally say—then relativists should be able to do the same. If relativists adopt this strategy, they can easily explain cases such as (68). Jesse can use a perspective-neutral proposition to indicate that he finds Budweiser tasty. However, because by doing so Jesse also gives Casey knowledge about the grounds of Jesse’s claim, it is perfectly natural for Casey to challenge those grounds. It is a bit more awkward for the meaning perspectivalist to explain (68), though it can be done. Casey seems to be saying that the normative question isn’t necessarily settled by Jesse’s perspective. However, because according to meaning perspectivalism Jesse is just describing his own taste perspective, Casey would be switching topics in a radical and inappropriate way.

### **3.6.3 Critique of Schaffer: retraction**

Is Schaffer right that relativism cannot explain the motivation for retraction, while meaning perspectivalism can? Again, Schaffer’s worry here is not that relativism cannot semantically accommodate retraction—in fact, relativism was built to do just that. His worry is that retraction would be unmotivated in a relativist picture. What reason could there be to retract if truth is always relative to a perspective? First of all, like meaning perspectivalism, relativism can appeal to contextual effects to explain certain cases of retraction, cases like (55), for instance. Relativists simply need to allow that context affects the topic or the purpose of the conversation, not the semantics. Allowing for context to affect the topic or the purpose of the conversation will allow for additional information to be conveyed when an individual utters a perspective-neutral proposition beyond just the perspective-neutral proposition. Clearly, Sam’s question in (55) sets the topic of conversation, which is about finding a beer that everyone would enjoy. In that case, Ed is not retracting the perspective-neutral claim;

rather, his retraction is intended to communicate something like ‘Oh, I was taking my own taste perspective to represent both of our perspectives, and it clearly doesn’t’ or ‘Oh, I was taking my taste to be representative of the average person’s tastes, and it clearly is not.’ However, the relativist can still allow that retractions do target the perspective-neutral proposition. This is helpful for explaining what, in chapter 3, I called “cases of strong retraction.” These are cases in which an individual says, “What I said was false” or “What I said was not true” as opposed to saying, “I was wrong.” Furthermore, it may turn out that we have reason for thinking that in some debates a perspective-neutral proposition is what is at issue. For instance, at least on the face of it, in some normative examples of substantive disagreement such as (57), the retraction does appear—at least on the surface—to target the perspective-neutral claim. If that is the case, then relativism always has the perspective-neutral proposition available in the literal reading; it can offer a straightforward explanation of these cases.

Of course, as I argued earlier, whether the relativist can fully explain cases of retraction in substantive debate will depend on giving a successful account of gustatory norms. So for now, we will leave it as an open question whether relativism can fully explain the motivation for retraction. However, at this point it is appropriate to ask whether meaning perspectivalism can fully explain the motivation for retraction. As it turns out, the relativist is not alone in the need for a theory of gustatory norms.

### 3.6.3.1 Retractions of normative claims

Schaffer’s explanation of retraction involves treating retractions as acknowledgments of mistakes about descriptive claims. He says, “[Retraction] is possible to the extent that the one subject grants that the other person has better information *about the perspective at issue*.”<sup>26</sup> For instance, in (56), Bobby is just saying that ‘Magic

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<sup>26</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 217. The emphasis here is mine.

Hat is tasty to Bobby.’ He retracts only because he learns that Magic Hat isn’t actually tasty to him. In (57), Jeff’s utterance means, ‘Franzia is tasty to the expert.’ His retraction is an acknowledgment that he was wrong about this descriptive claim because Franzia is not in fact tasty to the expert.

This approach explains cases in which the topic of the debate is a claim about what a person’s tastes actually are (or in which the purpose of the debate is to establish the truth of descriptive claims about taste). In chapter 2, I called these *descriptive disagreements*. For instance, meaning perspectivalism explains (56) nicely, since the debate seemed to be about what Bobby actually likes, and Lesha had more information than Bobby about what Bobby actually likes. However, as I have argued in chapter 2, not all retractions target a description of a perspective. Can meaning perspectivalism explain cases in which the topic is a normative claim, for instance, a claim about what someone’s tastes ought to be? Consider (74), for instance.

(74) Heidi: Why didn’t you order strawberry jam? Orange marmalade isn’t tasty at all.

Tonya: You are wrong. Orange marmalade is tasty; you just don’t know what to look for. The bitterness of the orange rind perfectly complements the sweetness of the jam.

Heidi: [Tastes it again]: Wow, I was wrong; orange marmalade is tasty, after all.

In chapter 2, I called cases like (74) *normative disagreements*. According to meaning perspectivalism, Heidi’s claim means ‘Orange marmalade isn’t tasty to Heidi.’ However, when Tonya says, ‘You are wrong,’ she can’t be commenting on Heidi’s tastes, because she knows that at the time of utterance Heidi does not like marmalade. When Heidi retracts, she can’t be retracting the claim ‘Orange marmalade is tasty to Heidi,’ since at the time she uttered it that was true. Clearly, this debate is not about what

the tastes of the conversational participants are; it is about what their tastes ought to be.

Here the meaning perspectivalist is welcome to say that the topic or purpose of the disagreement in these cases is something other than the claims that the participants literally utter. It could be that Heidi's original claim means 'Orange marmalade isn't tasty to Heidi' and Tonya's claim just means 'Orange marmalade is tasty to Tonya,' but Tonya is using herself as a model for what Heidi's tastes should be. However, if the meaning perspectivalist adopts this strategy, she still owes us an explanation of what Tonya means when she says 'You are wrong' and what Heidi means when she says 'I was wrong.' In order to do this, the meaning perspectivalist needs to explain what it means to be wrong in a taste disagreement in cases where being wrong clearly means something other than being wrong about a descriptive claim. In this case, meaning perspectivalism is in the same boat with relativism in needing to give a theory of the normative aspect of taste in order to fully explain the motivation for retraction.

#### **3.6.4 Critique of Schaffer: substantive debate and mere denial**

Again, Schaffer's criticism of relativism with regard to substantive debate and mere denial is a version of the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement. This is essentially a question about what could motivate substantive disagreement if the propositions involved in a debate are perspective neutral. I have argued that relativism does have a chance at solving this problem if it can be paired with an explanation of the normative aspect of taste. It is equally important to ask a similar question of meaning perspectivalism, that is, "What motivates substantive disagreement if taste claims are just descriptions of individual taste perspectives?"

In his explanation of substantive debate, Schaffer says, "[Substantive debate] is possible to the extent that each subject may consider herself at least as well informed

as the other *with respect to the perspective at issue.*"<sup>27</sup> Schaffer's account does an excellent job of explaining why some substantive disagreements are motivated. In particular, he explains substantive disagreements in which the purpose of the debate is to figure out what a person's tastes really are. However, as I've suggested, many examples of taste disagreements appear to be normative in nature as opposed to merely descriptive.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, as I will show below, some debates seem to be about the object being tasted—in particular, whether it is *really* tasty—and not about the tasters.

#### 3.6.4.1 Debates about real tastiness

Certainly, some substantive disagreements about taste are really just disagreements about what the participant's tastes actually are. However, could it be that all substantive disagreements about taste are really descriptive disagreements of this sort? Looking at the sort of evidence that is offered in taste disagreements gives us reason to think they are not. If the propositions under debate are just descriptions of individuals' tastes, we would expect the reasons offered in a debate about taste to be reasons that either confirm or deny those descriptive claims. We would expect the experts appealed to in the debate to be experts in what people's tastes actually are. Furthermore, we would expect the debate to be settled once it is clear what everyone's tastes really are. Yet, as I have argued in chapter 2, this is not what we see. In many cases, the debates are not settled by what the participants' tastes actually are. For instance, the participants in taste disagreements often appeal to evidence that goes beyond establishing what the participants' tastes actually are, they sometimes appeal to experts about what is really tasty, and they continue to appeal to evidence

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<sup>27</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 218. The emphasis here is mine.

<sup>28</sup>I have not said yet whether this means the debate must target a normative claim or whether the debate is driven by a normative goal. I will take on this project in the final chapter.

after it has been established what the relevant parties' tastes (including the expert's tastes) actually are. We have seen examples of this with (68) and (71), among others. Interestingly enough, the very example Schaffer provides seems to be a case in which the participants are not debating a descriptive claim.

(75) Ann: Licorice is tasty.

Ben: No, licorice is not tasty.

Ann: But consider the warmth of the anise.

Schaffer uses (75) to criticize relativism, saying,

Continuing with the possibility of substantive debate in D4, it is mysterious how the truth relativist could motivate any substantive debate. With [(75)], if the underlying facts are that [licorice is tasty] is true for Ann but false for Ben, then what is Ann doing appealing to something like the warmth of the anise? Why is she providing reasons at all? She should just recognize that Ben doesn't like licorice and be done.<sup>29</sup>

However, Schaffer's criticism of relativism seems to apply equally well to meaning perspectivalism. Why is Ann appealing to the warmth of the anise when all her claim means is that 'licorice is tasty to Ann'? In appealing to this property of licorice, it seem as if Ann is trying to establish the tastiness of licorice and not something about Ann. Schaffer says, "Ann has every right to explain to Ben what features of the licorice she is recognizing."<sup>30</sup> True, Ann may have every right to do this, but why should she need to? We might be tempted to think that by noting some appealing qualities of licorice, Ann is offering Ben evidence that licorice is tasty to her. However, there is no need for Ann to offer such evidence, since, by uttering a perspective-specific

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<sup>29</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 221.

<sup>30</sup>Schaffer, 2009.

proposition that describes her tastes, Ann has already informed Ben that licorice is tasty to her. Unless Ben suspects that Ann does not know her own tastes, he should not need further convincing. And as we have seen, many substantive disagreements go well beyond what would be needed to rule out the possibility of a person being mistaken about what tastes good to him or her at a given moment.

#### **3.6.4.2 Responses for meaning perspectivalism?**

The meaning perspectivalist could respond in several ways; however, it is unclear how effective these responses will be. For instance, could it be that in (75), Ann's claim just means "tasty to both Ann and Ben" and that when Ben says 'no' he is targeting that claim? Perhaps, but in this case there is still no need for Ann to bring up anything about the licorice. Furthermore, there is no reason for the debate to continue after Ben has voiced his claim, since Ben's being clear that he does not like licorice would be enough to establish the claim 'licorice is not tasty to Ann and Ben.'

Another option is to say that Ann's claim (and perhaps all claims that give rise to substantive debates) are really claims about the tastes of the experts. It could be that when Ann brings in the qualities of the licorice, she is trying to establish that she is more of an expert than Ben is. Pointing out the properties of the object in order to establish who has more expertise would make perfect sense if the debate were about what was really tasty. However, according to Schaffer, substantive debate is supposed to be about which person is in a better position to determine who the contextually recognized expert is, not about which person is a better judge of licorice. How does pointing out the properties of the licorice help with that debate? Furthermore, there seem to be cases like (76), in which the disagreement is between two mutually recognized experts.

(76) Josephine: Macallan 21 is tasty. It's so round and smooth!

Jacqueline: That's false; Macallan 21 is not tasty. It may be round and smooth, but it lacks interest and character!

It seems implausible to think that in these cases the debate is intended to establish who is the contextually recognized expert. The meaning perspectivalist can always say that, although the propositions expressed in these cases are just descriptions of expert tastes, the real debate is to establish what the true expert likes. However, if the meaning perspectivalist takes this route, she ought to offer us an account of what true gustatory expertise consists in.

A third option is for the meaning perspectivalist to say that the purpose or topic of substantive disagreements goes beyond the propositions literally uttered by the participants. It could be that participants in a substantive taste debate are using descriptions of their own tastes (or the tastes of the experts) in the hopes that their interlocutors will take these descriptions as models for what their interlocutors' tastes ought to be. In that case, debates about taste resemble cases like (77), where individuals use statements about their own epistemic state as a model for what they think their interlocutor's state should be.

(77) Mac: I believe that there is life on Mars. They've found traces of water, which means the planet is capable of supporting life.

Josh: I don't believe there is life on Mars. There may be water on Mars, but Mars's atmosphere is inhospitable to life.

The reasons Mac and Josh offer in (77) are not intended to support the claim 'Mac believes there is life on Mars' or 'Josh believes there is not life on Mars.' Rather, they are intended to support the claims 'There is life on Mars' and 'There is not life on Mars.'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the reasons offered are in support of why each participant believes that there is or is not life on Mars. However, the contents of the beliefs are perspective-neutral propositions.



However, for this sort of debate to be motivated, there has to be a fact of the matter about life on Mars—one that doesn't depend on the beliefs of the conversational participants. That is why we can rephrase Mac and Josh's debate using claims about Mars rather than claims about Mac's or Josh's epistemic states. But on Schaffer's account, taste claims aren't about what is really tasty; they are always about what is tasty to an individual. In that case, there is no way to talk about tastiness simpliciter because "tasty" always means "tasty to x." It could be that there is no fact of the matter as to what is really tasty beyond what is tasty to an individual. However, this is a substantive philosophical claim, one that demands philosophical investigation. It all depends on what makes something really tasty and whether there is even a fact of the matter about tastiness. The meaning perspectivalist owes us a fuller explanation of what motivates substantive taste disagreements, and this explanation ought to include information about what counts as evidence for taste claims, who are the taste experts, and whether there even is a fact of the matter about tastiness.

### **3.6.5 Critique of Schaffer: faultless disagreement**

The last, and perhaps the most troublesome, datum for meaning perspectivalism is faultless disagreement. In this section, I will not consider whether relativism can handle faultless disagreement. As with substantive disagreement, I've argued that the relativist's prospects for handling faultless disagreement depend on her developing an adequate theory of gustatory norms. Instead, I will focus on the three strategies Schaffer offers on behalf of meaning perspectivalism to handle faultless disagreement. I will argue that all three approaches are promising, but that each of them requires augmentation with a theory that explains the normative aspect of taste disagreement and the grounds of taste claims.

### 3.6.5.1 The implicature approach and the plurality approach

First, we can consider Schaffer's implicature strategy. Recall that on this strategy, disagreements about taste were really disagreements about propositions "downstream" from the propositions being uttered in the dispute. So, for instance, in Schaffer's example (78), the debate is faultless in the sense that each participant literally says something true. Ann's utterance may literally mean 'Anchovies are not tasty to Ann,' while Ben's utterance may literally mean 'Anchovies are not tasty to Ben.' However, Ann and Ben are not merely talking past one another because, as Schaffer says, "The real 'debate' over what is tasty is playing a political role—via implicature—as to how Ann and Ben should coordinate their actions."<sup>32</sup>

(78) Ben: Hey, Ann, which topping should we get on the pizza?

Ann: Anchovies are tasty.

Ben: No, anchovies are not tasty.

Ann: Yes, they are.

Ben: No, they aren't.

As I argued in chapter 2, this strategy seems to be on the right track and could be employed on behalf of both contextualism and relativism. However, in order to explain cases of normative disagreement in which there seems to be a right answer as to how one ought to coordinate, this strategy needs to be coupled with a theory of taste norms.

Second, we can consider Schaffer's plurality-of-speech-contexts approach. Ultimately, this approach will also require a theory of taste norms. All three versions of the approach that Schaffer articulates run into the Problem of Talking Past or the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement. That is, each account will have to explain

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<sup>32</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 219.

why taste disagreements are motivated, given that a plurality of speech contexts may be associated with a given utterance. We have already examined Stephenson's pragmatic solution to this problem and found that in order to fully explain the motivation for taste disagreements, we would need a theory of taste norms.

### 3.6.5.2 The epistemic approach

Finally, we can consider Schaffer's epistemic approach. Can faultless disagreement be explained by saying that the faultlessness involved is merely epistemic? This is a promising strategy, because it challenges us to find a relevant difference between taste disagreements and intractable disagreements about empirical matters of fact. Schaffer compares disagreements about taste to a case of political disagreement.

(79) Clair: Hey, Ann and Ben, I know you have different political views—what do you guys think about Bush? Was he a mere puppet of the oil industry and other moneyed interests?

Ann: Bush was a mere puppet of the moneyed interests.

Ben: No, Bush was not a mere puppet of the moneyed interests.

Ann: Yes, he was.

Ben: No, he wasn't.<sup>33</sup>

Schaffer says,

In such a case there is a single factual claim in dispute (I assume that [Bush was merely a puppet of the moneyed interests] is not a matter whose truth or falsity depends on your perspective—but change the example if you think otherwise). One of Ann or Ben is speaking falsely. But each might still be speaking responsibly, insofar as each might conceivably find some

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<sup>33</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 218.

support from the historical record (again, change the example if you think otherwise). The opponent of meaning perspectivalism needs to explain how the matter of faultless disagreement relevantly differs from the kind of intractable disputes one finds between political partisans concerning what are evidentially matters of objective fact.<sup>34</sup>

Whether or not we adopt Schaffer's epistemic approach, it is important to consider whether there really is a difference between disagreements involving "subjective matters of taste" and disagreements involving "objective matters of fact." This is a point I will discuss in chapter 4. I argue that philosophers and linguists who appeal to faultless disagreement often rely on an implicit comparison between examples of trivial disagreements involving taste and more substantive disagreements involving empirical matters of fact. I argue that disagreements about taste are much more similar to disagreements about empirical matters of fact than the recent literature has allowed. Even so, some important differences remain to be explained. In particular, I think that while the faultlessness involved in disagreements about epistemic cases is always epistemic or assertoric, some cases of taste disagreement are genuinely faultless. That is to say, in some cases of taste disagreements the fault involved does not seem to be either epistemic or assertoric.

In order to demonstrate this point, it will help to return to Schaffer's epistemic explanation of faultless disagreement. We can start by considering what the epistemic approach does well. I will change the examples from political disagreements because it is less controversial that these cases generate intuitions of objectivity.

Some cases of empirical disagreements are easily resolvable, both in principle and in practice.

(80) Josh: Water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen.

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<sup>34</sup>Schaffer, 2009, p. 218.

Pete: That's not true. Water is not composed of hydrogen and oxygen.

Other cases of empirical disagreement, though resolvable in principle, may still be difficult or even impossible to resolve in practice.

(81) Evolutionist: The earth is 4.54 billion years old.

Creationist: That's false; the earth is not 4.54 billion years old.

(82) Bohr: The Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics is true.

Einstein: The Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics is not true.

(83) Becky: The number of stars in the universe is even.

Joe: That's not true. The number of stars in the universe is not even.

Some cases of taste disagreement clearly resemble the examples above. As I pointed out in my discussion of relativism, some cases of taste disagreements resemble cases of empirical disagreements that are in principle resolvable, whether or not they are resolvable in practice. In these cases, the intuition of faultlessness is also pretty clearly epistemic.<sup>35</sup> For instance, consider (84), in which two individuals debate about the taste of strychnine.

(84) Maddie: Candy is tastier than strychnine.

Dave: That's not true; candy is not tastier than strychnine.

Here is a case in which I think we have pretty strong intuitions that Dave is mistaken, even if he happens to believe that strychnine is tastier than candy. If we had to fill in the context, we might guess that Dave has never tasted strychnine or candy, was confused about what items were being described, or perhaps has no taste buds at all. In that case, it would be understandable that Dave would think or say that

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<sup>35</sup>Though, as I will argue in chapter 4, they may be faultless in another sense as well.

strychnine was tastier than candy; nonetheless, he would be mistaken. Similarly, consider Oliver's situation in (85).

(85) Oliver Twist: Gruel is tasty!

The Artful Dodger: That's not true. Gruel is not tasty! You don't know that because you've never had anything else.

It's true that gruel tastes good to Oliver, and so we can hardly blame him for thinking gruel is tasty. Nonetheless, it seems that what the Dodger says is true; gruel is not tasty.

There are two things to say about these cases. First, even if Schaffer is right and all cases of faultless disagreement were like (84) and (85), it would still be important for us to know what determines who is right in these cases. For instance, is Maddie right because truth is grounded in what is tasty to her? Is she right because the truth about taste is grounded in what is tasty to the average person? Is she right because the truth is grounded in what is tasty to the experts—whoever they are? Is she right because there is some objective fact of the matter as to what is tasty? The answer makes a difference, because a semantic theory will have to account for this data, either directly or indirectly. In that case, taking the epistemic approach would still require giving an account of what grounds the truth of taste claims.

### 3.6.5.3 Beyond epistemic fault: genuinely faultless disagreements

Second, and more interestingly, other cases of taste disagreements do not resemble disagreements about empirical matters of fact.<sup>36</sup> The faultlessness that appears to be present in these cases does not seem to be solely a matter of epistemic fault. For instance, compare Dave and Maddie's debate about candy to Katie and Luke's debate about candy in (115).

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<sup>36</sup>At least assuming that all cases of empirical matters of fact are in principle resolvable. There may be some reason to think that some are not.

(86) Katie: Candy is tastier than steak.

Luke: Candy is not tastier than steak.

In 115, not only is it not clear who is right, it is unclear whether there is even a fact of the matter as to who is right. We often get a sense of faultlessness in cases where we compare tastes from different genres, and yet it doesn't seem like a kind of epistemic fault. We have similar intuitions of faultlessness in cases like (87), in which the individuals are from different cultures or have radically different backgrounds.

(87) Thaiander: Hot peppers are tasty.

Icelander: Hot peppers are not tasty.

We have even stronger intuitions of faultlessness in cases in which the individuals are from different species. For instance, take (88), or a version of Lasersohn's cat-food example (89).

(88) Zombie: Brains are tasty!

Human: Brains are not tasty!

(89) Cat: Cat food is tasty.

Human: Cat food is not tasty.

Again, in these cases it does not seem that the faultlessness is merely epistemic. Instead, it seems that there is a fact of the matter as to who is right.

We do not need to resort to science fiction to find some of the strongest examples of what appear to be genuinely faultless disagreements.<sup>37</sup> Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania conducted a study of the gene TAS2R38—a gene that is responsible for coding the bitter-taste receptor protein. The study suggests that:

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<sup>37</sup>By using the term 'genuinely faultless,' I am not intending to make any substantive claims about the nature of these disagreements. I only trying to distinguish them from disagreements in which the fault appears to be solely epistemic.

People with a certain version of that gene can taste a compound, phenylthiocarbamide, or PTC, which is chemically similar to naturally occurring bitter compounds, called glucosinolates, present in many foods, including cruciferous vegetables like broccoli and Brussels sprouts. These tasters find such foods to have a bitter taste that people with a different version can't detect. As a result, tasters have been shown to consume fewer cruciferous vegetables.<sup>38</sup>

Given the results of this study and others like it, it is hard to believe that there could be a fact of the matter as to who is right in examples with two individuals with different genetic profiles, such as (90).

(90) Non-PTC taster: Broccoli is tasty.

PTC taster: Broccoli is not tasty.

Finally, consider (91), an example based on a real-life debate between the famous wine critics Robert Finigan and Robert Parker over the 1982 vintage Bordeaux.<sup>39</sup>

(91) Robert Parker: The 1982 Bordeaux is tasty! It is full and flavorful.

Robert Finigan: The 1982 Bordeaux is not tasty! It is overly ripe and lacks the proper acidity.

Here, two equally qualified experts disagree, and yet it is not clear that there is a fact of the matter as to which one of them should defer. In this respect, it seems very unlike the debate in (82) between the two scientific experts over the correct interpretation of quantum mechanics.

In each of these cases, it seems that more than epistemic faultlessness is at issue. I think this is because, in each of these cases, the disagreements are not only irre-

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<sup>38</sup><http://www.upenn.edu/pennnews/news/penn-geneticists-help-show-bitter-taste-perception-not-just-about-flavors>

<sup>39</sup>For an informal recap on this famous debate, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_M.Parker,\\_Jr.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_M.Parker,_Jr.)



solvable in practice—like the cases of intractable empirical disagreements I pointed to—they are irresolvable in principle as well. Because of this, these examples cannot be explained by appealing to the lack of epistemic error, because there is nothing for the participants to be epistemically mistaken about.

Contrary to what Schaffer claims, faultless disagreement does not just arise when the participants are in principle disposed to engage in an endless series of denials. Rather, the conditions under which faultless disagreement arise are far more subtle and complicated than that. First, the fact that participants are in principle disposed to engage in an endless series of denials is not sufficient for faultless disagreement.<sup>40</sup> There are many reasons why the participants could be disposed to engage in an endless series of denials, and these reasons may make a difference to whether we have the intuition that the debate is faultless. For instance, if the participants of (81) or (84) were stubborn enough, they might be disposed to engage in an endless series of denials. Yet I take it that the presence of mere stubbornness would not generate an intuition of faultlessness. Second, the fact that participants are in principle disposed to engage in an endless series of denials cannot be necessary for faultless disagreement. This is because there are cases such as (90) and (91) that would seem faultless even if the participants were not disposed to let the debate carry on past its opening remarks. What Schaffer seems to be trying to get at is that at the root of intuitions of faultlessness are intuitions about resolvability. I've argued that the most striking examples of faultless disagreement come in cases in which the disagreements are irresolvable in principle, besides or in addition to being irresolvable in practice. It is these sorts of cases that make disagreements about taste different from disagreements about empirical matters of fact. In this case, it is important to figure out why features

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<sup>40</sup>Though, as I've said, I do not take Schaffer to be arguing that endless denial is sufficient for faultless disagreement, only that it is necessary. But because Schaffer never fully explores the connection between endless denial and faultless disagreement, I think it is important to show why endless denial is neither necessary nor sufficient.

like cultural background, genetics, genre, and so on make a difference in resolvability when these things do not normally matter for deciding debates about empirical matters of fact.

The task, then, for any semantic theory with regard to faultless disagreement, including meaning perspectivalism, will be to explain both kinds of cases of faultless disagreement—the cases that involve merely epistemic fault and the cases that appear to be genuinely faultless. In order to do this, they will have to explain why some taste disagreements seem resolvable in principle while others do not. Again, this task will involve an exploration of the grounds of taste claims, a project I will turn to in the next chapter.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

I have argued that D1-D6 are primarily driven by intuitions about the purpose of taste disagreements—a pragmatic factor that, in principle, could be accounted for by either relativism or contextualism. However, in order to know whether either relativism or contextualism can really accommodate this data, we have to answer some questions that have been mostly ignored or taken for granted in the debate about the semantics of taste predicates. On the one hand, we will have to ask what motivates substantive taste disagreements—especially normative taste disagreements. As I have argued, this explanation ought to include information about what counts as evidence for taste claims, who are the taste experts, and whether there even is a fact of the matter about tastiness. On the other hand, we will also have to ask what accounts for the fact that some taste disagreements seem entirely trivial—that is, why some disagreements about taste seem genuinely faultless.

These are all questions, ultimately, about what grounds the truth of taste claims. Figuring out what grounds taste claims is much more complicated than those participating in the semantic debate about taste have recognized. If we assume that taste

claims are purely subjective—grounded in nothing more than individual preferences—it will be difficult to explain normative aspects of disagreements. However, if we assume that taste disagreements are purely objective, we will not be able to explain why some disagreements seem genuinely faultless. This leaves us with a puzzle: how do we explain the objective and subjective aspects of taste disagreements? In the next chapter, I will attempt to offer a solution to this puzzle. In the final chapter, I will return to the semantic debate, and show how offering a theory of the grounds of taste claims can solve both the Problem of Talking Past for contextualism and the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement for relativism.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PARADOX OF GUSTATORY TASTE

#### 4.1 Introduction

In chapter 1, I presented the “Puzzle of Faultless Disagreement” as it is often interpreted in the current literature on predicates of personal taste. The puzzle focused on how to give an account of taste disagreements that could capture both faultlessness and genuine disagreement. I argued that the most basic versions of contextualism and relativism failed to solve the puzzle.

In chapters 2 and 3, I argued that even more sophisticated versions of the theories could not fully solve the puzzle. In my critique of these theories, I followed Schaffer in arguing that we ought to examine a wider range of taste disagreements held against richer contextual backdrops. I agreed with Schaffer first that our intuitions of faultlessness were heavily dependent on the context surrounding the examples, and second that faultless was only one among many data generated from taste disagreements.

However, although examining a richer set of examples is essential, doing so makes it unclear exactly what an account of taste disagreements is supposed to capture. In this chapter, I reexamine the original puzzle of faultless disagreement, beginning with a discussion of how the puzzle is generated. I suggest that the original puzzle relies on an implicit comparison between disagreements about taste and disagreements about empirical matters of fact. The puzzle also relies on an assumption about the subjectivity of taste. I will argue that the real puzzle of taste disagreement involves explaining a seemingly contradictory set of data. I call this new puzzle the “Paradox

of Gustatory Taste”<sup>1</sup> after the Kantian “Paradox of Aesthetic Taste.”<sup>2</sup> The Kantian paradox essentially involves explaining how aesthetic judgements, such as judgments about beauty, can be both objective and subjective—a seemingly paradoxical task.

After introducing the paradox, I argue that in order to solve it, we must appeal to a theory about the purpose of taste disagreements. I claim that, in turn, this requires a theory of the grounds of taste disagreements, in particular, an account of gustatory value. Finally, I present such a theory, which is based on an account of aesthetic value by Peter Railton. By the end of the chapter, we will be poised to offer a complete explanation of taste disagreements and to apply this explanation to the semantic debate about predicates of personal taste—a task I take up in chapter 5.

## 4.2 The Paradox of Taste

### 4.2.1 Disagreements about taste and empirical disagreements

When thinking about taste, it is natural to bring to mind examples of taste disagreements that contrast sharply with disagreements about empirical matters of fact. For instance, not too long ago, an episode of Rachael Ray’s daytime talk show featured a couple involved in a heated culinary debate. Here’s an excerpt from Rachael’s website summing up the conflict:

Stacie and Mark have a disagreement about pasta. He’ll only eat spaghetti, and she wants him to try rigatoni, penne...anything other than spaghetti all the time! “I want Rachael to show him that there is a reason why you use different pastas with different sauces,” says Stacie, hoping they’ll solve their “noodle war” on the show. But when Rachael blindfolds him

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<sup>1</sup>Like the Paradox of Aesthetic Taste, the Paradox of Gustatory Taste is not a true paradox, but a puzzle. However, I will retain the phrase “paradox” to make clear how closely the gustatory puzzle that arises resembles the class aesthetic puzzle.

<sup>2</sup>See Kant, 1790. See Schellekens, 2009, for a summary of the Paradox of Aesthetic Taste and its relationship to Gustatory Taste.

for a taste test, he still chooses spaghetti as his favorite! “You’re stuck eating spaghetti the rest of your days,” Rachael tells Stacie, giving her a gift certificate to Lupa, one of Mario Batali’s restaurants.<sup>3</sup>

Most likely, Mark and Stacie’s “noodle war” is a dispute about many things. But whatever else it may be, their argument is also a disagreement about taste. We can easily imagine Mark and Stacie standing in their kitchen participating in the following sort of dialog.<sup>4</sup>

(92) Stacie: Why don’t we try rigatoni for dinner? Rigatoni is just as tasty as spaghetti.

Mark: No, rigatoni is not as tasty as spaghetti. Spaghetti is tastier than rigatoni!

When discussing gustatory matters, we sometimes appeal to the familiar expression “there is no disputing about taste” (or, for those who speak Latin, “de gustibus non disputandum est”).<sup>5</sup>

Of course, as the episode from Rachael Ray’s show reveals, people dispute about taste all of the time. Clearly, by reciting the familiar latin phrase we do not mean to say that we *do not* argue about matters of taste.<sup>6</sup> What we seem to mean is that

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.rachaelrayshow.com/show/segments/view/a-couples-noodle-war/>

<sup>4</sup>Although the word ‘tasty’ is not prominent in the written summary, in the broadcast, Stacy and Mark do have a dialog very close to the one I have invented here. Stacy wanted Mark to try rigatoni because she thought that while all pastas taste the same, the shape of different pastas pairs better with different sauces. Mark refused to try rigatoni for dinner because he felt that spaghetti was tastier than any other pasta, irrespective of the change in sauce. So in addition to being a disagreement about what to have for dinner, and about whether the shape of pasta could affect the taste of aspects such as sauce, it was also a disagreement about the tastiness of spaghetti and rigatoni.

<sup>5</sup>See Egan, 2010, for an interesting discussion of what we mean when we say that there is “no disputing about taste.”

<sup>6</sup>That is, unless you think that these sorts of dialogs fail to qualify as disagreements at all. I think the real question is not whether these sorts of dialogs are disagreements—let us grant for now that the definition of “disagreement” is broad enough to include them. The more interesting question

disagreements about taste often appear to be pointless or futile in a way that other kinds of disagreement—disagreements about empirical matters of fact, for example—do not.<sup>7</sup> For example, compare Stacie and Mark’s dispute with the following fictional case of disagreement between Rachael Ray and Bobby Flay.

(93) Rachael Ray: Adding salt to the water makes it boil faster.

Bobby Flay: No way, Rachael! Adding salt to the water does not make it boil faster.

In (93), at least one person is *mistaken* in his or her judgment, either in the sense that they have been epistemically irresponsible or in the sense that they have said something false. The disagreement is *in principle resolvable*. There is some *fact of the matter*—a fact about the way the world is, in and of itself—that grounds the truth of each judgment. This *objective ground* determines who is mistaken. Assuming that Rachael and Bobby are both rational and epistemically responsible people, the disagreement has a chance of being *resolvable in practice* as well as in principle. It would be relatively easy to obtain information about the relevant empirical facts in this case, and this information could serve as *evidence* for or against either claim. If neither Bobby nor Rachael have direct access to the right empirical data, they could always appeal to the *testimony* of the relevant *scientific experts* to help settle the dispute.

Imagine that Rachael is in possession of strong evidence for her claim. If Bobby considers Rachael to be an epistemically reliable source of information, then assuming he values having true beliefs, he has an epistemic *reason* to change his mind about the matter. If epistemic value is linked to any sort of *epistemic obligation*, then not

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is how closely disagreements about taste resemble disagreements in other areas (scientific or moral disagreements, for instance).

<sup>7</sup>In his (2010) article, Egan makes the point that, dispute insisting that taste is something about which there can be no dispute, we often do just that. Egan offers an alternative explanation for this fact.

only does Bobby have a reason to change his mind, he *ought* to change his mind. If Bobby meets his epistemic obligations (and if he does not mind admitting defeat), he may even *retract* his original claim, as in (94).

(94) Rachael Ray: The scientists at the Harvard lab have determined that adding salt does make water boil slightly faster.

Bobby Flay: Really? Well, I guess I was wrong. Adding salt to the water does make it boil faster.

At first glance, Stacie and Mark's disagreement looks very different from Rachael and Bobby's disagreement. To begin with, it is not clear that either Stacie or Mark is mistaken in judgment. Both individuals seem to be "faultless" to some extent, either in the sense that neither of them has done anything epistemically improper, or perhaps even in the sense that neither one of them has said anything false.<sup>8</sup> It seems natural to think that part of the explanation for these differences is that matters of taste are grounded in some way in *subjective experience*, in addition to the way the world is otherwise. Further, matters of taste seem closely connected in some way to *personal preference*.

If matters of taste are *subjective* in this way, then perhaps this explains why we have the intuition that neither Mark nor Stacie is mistaken in their claims. After all, how could it be possible for someone to err in a judgment of taste? Granted, there is some chance that someone could be mistaken about the content of his perceptual experience, or even that he could be mistaken about what he truly prefers. For instance, force of habit or sheer stubbornness could mask someone's true preferences. Perhaps this is the kind of mistake that Rachael is trying to rule out by administering the taste test to Mark. But once it has been established that Mark really does prefer spaghetti to any other pasta, it seems *pointless to try to persuade him* of the tastiness

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<sup>8</sup>Max Kölbel coined the term "faultless disagreement" in his (2003) article.



of other pastas. And of course, the taste test does not prove that Stacie was mistaken in her judgment. Perhaps if Stacie were blindfolded and asked to choose, it would show that she liked all of the pastas equally well. Along the same lines, it is hard to imagine what could count as an *epistemic reason* in this case—it's hard to see what could *epistemically motivate* Mark or Stacie to change their minds. It certainly seems that neither Stacie or Mark are *obligated* in any way to change their minds.

Given these observations, it is natural to think that Stacie and Mark's disagreement is not only *in practice irresolvable* but *in principle irresolvable* as well.<sup>9</sup> After all, if man (or woman) is the measure of truth in matters of taste, and men (or women) differ with regard to their subjective experiences, then there is no external standard to which we can justifiably appeal in order to settle a dispute.

#### 4.2.2 Not so faultless?

Comparing an example like (92) with an example like (93) appears to vindicate the intuition that disagreements about taste are pointless and inconsequential. After all, the linguistic and epistemic practices of the participants in (92) look very different from the practices of the participants in (93). MacFarlane articulates this sentiment in his 2007 article.

It has often been proposed that claims about what is funny, delicious, or likely are “subjective,” in the sense that their truth depends not only on how things are with the objects they explicitly concern, but on how things are with some subject not explicitly mentioned. This thought is supported by the striking degree to which we differ in our judgements about these matters. If there are wholly objective properties of funniness, delicious-

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<sup>9</sup>In his 2011 reply to Cappelen and Hawthorn, Lasersohn cites irresolvability as the reason that taste disagreements are often easily abandoned. “As many people have pointed out to me, people often drop a debate as soon as it becomes clear that it is over a matter of taste. It seems to me, however, that we do not drop such debates because our sense of disagreement has disappeared, but rather because we know that it is not resolvable.”

ness, or likelihood, then most of us must be defective in our capacity to detect them. We are humor-blind, or taste-blind, or likelihood-blind, in much the same way that some of us are color-blind. But this diagnosis clashes with the way we think and talk about these domains. In our judgments about what is delicious, we lack the humility color-blind people show in their judgments about what is red or green. We do not seem to regard the fact that many others disagree with us as grounds for caution in calling foods delicious. We readily judge things to be funny in light of our own senses of humor, even though when challenged we can offer no grounds for thinking our senses of humor are the “right” ones. We readily judge things to be likely in light of what we know, even while acknowledging that our knowledge is only partial, and that others may know more than we do.<sup>10</sup>

However, if we were to consider a wider range of examples of taste disagreements, we would find that in many cases the behavior of the participants in a taste disagreement does in some respects resemble the behavior of the participants in an empirical disagreement.

To begin with, there seem to be cases in which the conversational participants are attempting to *change one another’s minds* about taste. Consider this ongoing debate between Ed and Jim about the taste of beer:

(95) Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn’t tasty at all! It’s so watered down it hardly tastes like beer. Guinness, on the other hand, has a far richer flavor. If you started drinking more stouts, you would see what I mean.

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<sup>10</sup>MacFarlane, 2007, p. 1.

Ed: Budweiser is tasty! It's crisp and refreshing, just like an American lager is supposed to be. You're just expecting the wrong things from it by comparing it to other styles of beer.

Here it looks as though both Ed and Jim are attempting to *persuade* each other to change positions. Furthermore, they seem to be offering some kind of *evidence* for their positions. We can also find examples in which the conversational participants appear to appeal to *gustatory experts*, as in (96), or point to a large amount of *intersubjective agreement*, as in (97), in order to make their cases.

(96) Lowell: Sam said that the Ravenswood Cabernet is tasty.

Donovan: He's wrong. I read a review in *Wine Spectator* that said it wasn't.

(97) Dan: The food at Mimmo's is tasty.

Liz: No way! I've talked to a lot of people, and no one other than you thinks the food there is tasty.

Examples like (4), (96), and (97) give us reason to think that some disagreements about taste involve a *persuasive aspect*. Here it should also interest us that such attempts at persuasion are often successful. For instance, we can think of examples in which individuals appear to have been successfully persuaded to change their minds, sometimes to the point of issuing a *retraction*.

(98) Jacob: Why didn't you order strawberry jam? Orange marmalade isn't tasty at all.

Lily: Orange marmalade is tasty; you just don't know what to look for. The bitterness of orange rind perfectly complements the sweetness of the jam.

Jacob: [Tastes it again] I guess I was wrong. Orange marmalade is tastier than I thought.

It seems that, at least in some of the cases I have canvassed, not only is each participant trying to change his or her fellow interlocutor's mind, but the participants also think that their fellow interlocutors *ought* to change their minds. If that is the case, then these examples also give us reason to think that some disagreements about taste may have a *normative aspect* as well.<sup>11</sup>

As examples like the ones above begin to pile up, we might begin to wonder whether taste disagreements are as pointless or trivial as we might have thought.

### 4.2.3 The puzzle and the goal

At this point we are left with a bit of a puzzle. When we examine cases like (92), disagreements about taste seem very different from cases of empirical disagreement. In cases like (92), the participants often fail to offer much evidence for their positions or appeal to experts to resolve their disputes. The disputes appear to be faultless in some sense, and it appears as though these debates are irresolvable both in principle and in practice. These sorts of cases leave us with the impression that taste disagreements are rather trivial.

On the other hand, when we examine other cases of taste disagreements like (95), (96), (97), and (98), we get the impression that some disagreements about taste are more similar to disagreements about empirical matters of fact than we might have thought. In these cases, the conversational participants sometimes do offer evidence for their positions—evidence that seems designed to persuade their interlocutors. They appeal to experts and to intersubjective agreement to resolve disputes, and they sometimes proceed as if there were normative constraints on the debate. In these cases, it looks as though there is some sense in which at least one of the participants is

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<sup>11</sup>I have been using examples in which the participants use 'tasty' rather than examples in which the participants use expressions like 'tastes good' or 'is good.' I think we might have even stronger intuitions about the persuasive and normative aspects of taste if we were to look at cases involving 'tastes good' or 'is good' than we do for cases involving 'tasty.'

at fault, though the fault might not be a result of falsity or epistemic irresponsibility. Furthermore, some of these disagreements are resolvable both in principle and in practice. These sorts of cases leave us with the impression that disagreements about taste are not trivial.

The challenge, then, is to give an explanation of taste disagreements that can make sense of the wide variety of taste disagreements. My goal in this paper is to meet this challenge. I believe that the best way to accomplish this goal is to offer a theory about the *purpose* of taste disagreements. After all, what it means for someone to be in error or at fault in a disagreement depends on what goal or ideal they have fallen short of. Likewise, what determines whether it makes sense to offer evidence or appeal to experts in a disagreement depends on what the conversational participants are trying to accomplish. And what determines whether a disagreement is resolvable depends on the goal of resolution.

I argue that, whereas disagreements about empirical matters of fact are often motivated (among other things) by the pursuit of an important epistemic value, namely truth, disagreements about taste are often motivated (among other things) by the pursuit of an important gustatory value, namely pleasure. However, I will also argue that disagreements about taste have something important in common with disagreements about empirical matters of fact: the participants in both kinds of disagreement use the same sort of method—coordination—to accomplish their respective aims. In disagreements about empirical matters of fact, the participants often attempt to coordinate their epistemic perspectives in such a way as to produce a more accurate picture of the world. I suggest that, in a taste disagreement, the participants often attempt to coordinate their gustatory perspectives in such a way as to yield more gustatory pleasure for the participants.

In chapter 5, I will apply my theory of the purpose of taste disagreements to the puzzle of taste disagreements. I will argue that taking the goal of gustatory

disagreements to be the pursuit of gustatory value can explain the persuasive and normative aspects of taste disagreements. I claim that it can also provide a way in which the participants in a taste disagreement are at fault—a way that does not undermine the intuition that some disagreements about taste are faultless in some sense. Finally, I will show how appealing to gustatory value can explain why some disagreements about taste are irresolvable while others are not.

### 4.3 Subjectivity and Error

In order to explain the wide variety of taste disagreements hinted at in the introductory section, we will need to rethink some of our original assumptions about the nature of taste disagreements. We will recall that at first it seemed natural to explain our intuitions about example (92) by making the following assumptions: taste disagreements are faultless because matters of taste depend on the subjective experiences of the individual—something about which the individual cannot be in error. They are irresolvable because there is no fact of the matter as to who is right in taste disagreements. Because there is no fact of the matter as to who is right, there is no such thing as evidence or experts in a taste disagreement. Of course, this kind of explanation for (92) leaves cases like (95), (96), (97), and (98) mysterious.

I argue that finding an explanation for cases like (95), (96), (97), and (98) involves, first, challenging the assumption that the subjectivity of taste claims precludes an individual from being in error about a taste judgment. Second, it involves challenging the assumption that there is never any fact of the matter as to who is right in a disagreement about taste.

Before I proceed, I want to take a moment to talk about what it means to say that matters of taste are subjective and to discuss why one might think that the subjectivity of taste precludes error in taste claims. I will also discuss one popular,

though ultimately unsuccessful, theory of the purpose of disagreement designed to accommodate the subjectivity of taste.

### 4.3.1 Subjectivity and sensations

Much debate occurs about the nature of subjectivity and about how to distinguish objective matters from “merely” subjective matters. One way of defining objectivity is to say that objective matters are those that depend somehow on the way the world is. As we have seen, it is natural, though not uncontroversial, to think that disagreements about empirical matters of fact, such as the one depicted in (93), are objective in this way. How should we characterize subjectivity? Since our goal is to make sense of a variety of taste disagreements, we should start out by characterizing subjectivity as neutrally as possible. At a minimum, it seems that our intuitions about the subjectivity of taste require that matters of taste depend somehow on the individual. Here our characterization of subjectivity ought to allow for the possibility that matters of taste also depend somehow on the way the world is outside of the individual. For now, we can adopt the following characterization of subjectivity:

**The subjectivity of taste:** matters of taste depend at least in part on the way things are with the individual, in addition to the way the world is otherwise.

We can think of a variety of ways in which matters of taste might “depend on the individual.” At the very least, we might think that the properties involved in taste depend on the individual in the sense that these properties are *response-dependent*. Very roughly, response-dependent properties are powers of the object to reliably produce (under the right conditions) certain kinds of responses in individuals who are sensitive to them.<sup>12</sup> A more familiar (though also debatable) example of a response-dependent

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<sup>12</sup>My characterization of response dependence is based on Davies (2006).

property is color. The property of *redness*, for example, is partially dependent on mind independent features of the world such as wavelength, the surface properties of the object, and the environment. It is also partially dependent on properties of the individual, such as the presence of retinal cones and neural processors. Many of the properties involved in taste, such as bitterness, sweetness, saltiness, and sourness, seem similar to redness in this respect. A property like bitterness, for example, partially depends on mind independent features such as the presence of chemical properties like quinine and the tasting environment. Bitterness also partially depends on properties of the individual such as the presence of taste receptors and neurotransmitters.<sup>13</sup> If the properties involved in taste are response dependent, then we might want to make the following assumption:

**The sensation assumption:** There exist some items in the world that have properties which, given a particular environment, reliably cause certain taste sensations in individuals with a similar physiological makeup and a similar experiential background.<sup>14</sup>

By “taste sensations” I have in mind physiological sensations such as sweet, bitter, and so on that arise when an individual’s taste receptors are excited by substances like sucrose, quinine, and the like.<sup>15</sup> I will also use “taste sensations” more broadly to cover experiences of *flavor*, which results from things like post-nasal olfaction in

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<sup>13</sup>For an excellent introduction to the science of taste, see Korsmeyer (1999) chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup>The sensation assumption will be somewhat controversial. For instance, we might wonder whether it is possible for an item to cause the same taste sensations in two individuals even given similar physiological makeup and similar experiential background. The sensation assumption does not say that individuals who have the same sensations will have the same preferences or evaluations. For a discussion about this point, see Dennet (1988).

<sup>15</sup>For a brief overview of the physiology of human taste, see Bowen (2006).



addition to literal taste;<sup>16</sup> and to cover *mouthfeel*, which is the result of an item's texture.

Is response dependence responsible for the intuition that one cannot be in error about matters of taste? One could argue that there is no fact of the matter as to whether something is truly bitter because sensations of bitterness may vary depending on the physiological make up of the individual perceiving them. However, as I have hinted at in the introduction, I think that intuitions about the faultlessness of taste disagreements are not primarily generated from the fact that taste sensations can vary from person to person. After all, human beings have similar enough taste sensations that we usually judge bitterness, sweetness, and the like on the basis of an intersubjectively determined standard. Although the status of properties like bitterness is controversial, we can set it aside for now. The real worry about the subjectivity of taste comes from something deeper than worries about the response dependence of taste sensations.

#### **4.3.2 The real worry about subjectivity**

The subjective experience of taste involves more than just taste sensations. We have a whole host of responses and reactions to those sensations, and to the items that give rise to the sensations. We can think of the relationship between the sensations caused by gustatory items and the responses and reactions that we have to those items and sensations as underlying a sort of gustatory point of view, what I will call a *taste perspective*.

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<sup>16</sup>Here I am drawing on Bartoshuk and Duffy, who distinguish between literal taste and flavor in their (2005) article.

**Taste perspective:** a complex of dispositions to respond or react to the sensations produced by gustatory items, or to the gustatory items themselves.<sup>17</sup>

Among the responses and reactions involved in a taste perspective are things like taste *preferences*: likes and dislikes with regard to taste. They may also include things like taste *evaluations*: beliefs or attitudes about which gustatory items or experiences are better or worse than others. The real worry about the subjectivity of taste comes from the fact that matters of taste are somehow grounded in taste perspectives.

Here is one version of that worry. One way to think about the relationship between taste preferences and taste evaluations is that evaluative judgments about taste are grounded in our taste preferences. It is then assumed that it is impossible for an individual to be mistaken about her preferences because individuals have perfect access to information about their own likes and dislikes. In that case, it is impossible to be in error about our preferences. Furthermore, it is assumed that there are no further grounds for what preferences we ought to have. If this true, then it is impossible to be in error about which preferences we ought to have.

As I mentioned in the introduction, there is reason to think that an individual could be mistaken about which gustatory items he truly prefers. For instance, it might be that Jim thinks he likes the taste of Guinness for itself when really he likes to be seen drinking a more expensive beer.<sup>18</sup> In that case, perhaps the purpose of some taste disagreements is to discover what an individual's true preferences are—to separate out preferences that are based on the way the object tastes from the preferences that are based on things like social pressures or advertising appeal. However, the

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<sup>17</sup>We could characterize a taste perspective in a variety of ways. This way was suggested to me by Phil Bricker in conversation.

<sup>18</sup>My example here has to do with mistakes about the contents of our preferences. However, Nisbett and Wilson's (1977) paper, which gives reason to doubt that we have perfect (or even very good) access to our cognitive processes, might also be relevant.

worry remains that, once a person's true preferences have been established, no right or wrong answer exists as to which preferences she ought to have and no substantive reason exists for her to change her mind about her preferences.

### 4.3.3 An unsuccessful way to account for subjectivity

The philosophers and linguists who have suggested an explanation for the purpose of taste disagreements mostly take it for granted that since judgments about taste essentially involve subjective experiences, no right answers exists as to which experiences an individual ought to have. Hence, they assume, no one right way exists to resolve a dispute about taste. They go on to propose theories about the purpose of taste disagreements that capture those intuitions.<sup>19</sup> One suggestion is that the point of a taste disagreement is merely for individuals to express or describe their preferences. A related suggestion is that the purpose of taste disagreements is to gather information about the preferences of the individual conversational participants, or to establish what preferences the group has in common.<sup>20,21</sup>

Certainly, expressing or describing our preferences or mapping out a common preferential ground must be part of the reason for engaging in taste disagreements.<sup>22</sup> And perhaps in many cases of taste disagreement it is the sole purpose. After all,

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<sup>19</sup>For instance, see Stephenson (2007). Stephenson's account is proposed as a pragmatic addition to her semantic account of predicates of personal taste.

<sup>20</sup>In her (2007) article, Stephenson proposes a pragmatic account of disagreement that makes use of Stalnaker's notion of a "conversational common ground." Although her account is much more subtle and sophisticated than the view I am referring to here, I believe it will have similar difficulty explaining the persuasive and normative aspects of disagreements about taste that I refer to below.

<sup>21</sup>Here my aim is to discuss the purpose of taste disagreements, not to discuss claims about the semantics of taste. Figuring out how the purpose of disagreements relates to the semantics of taste is an interesting and complicated issue. I try to address this issue in chapter 5.

<sup>22</sup>So far, I am not committing myself to anything relating to the semantics of claims involving taste. For now, I am only talking about the motivations for taste disagreements. I think that it is possible that the semantics of expressions like "tasty" are related to issues about disagreement. However, I think we ought to take care in drawing semantic conclusions on the basis of our intuitions about taste disagreements and vice versa.

there will be many cases in which it is not clear to the conversational participants what preferences they have in common, and there are many practical decisions that rely on commonality. However, if discovering the tastes of the conversational participants were the sole purpose of a disagreement about taste, we would expect these disagreements to terminate once the conversational participants knew where each of them stood with regard to their tastes. And yet, it is not difficult to imagine cases of *ongoing disagreement about taste* in which the disagreement continues long after the participants have fully cataloged the tastes of the group.

(99) Mark: I'll say it again, spaghetti is tastier than rigatoni!

Stacie: So you keep telling me, but you're wrong. Every kind of pasta tastes exactly the same. Why can't you see that?

Furthermore, claiming that the goal of taste disagreements is merely descriptive or expressive will not help us explain the persuasive aspects of some taste disagreements. If the point of taste disagreements were for the participants to give each other information about their own tastes or to discover what tastes the participants had in common, there would be no call for the participants to offer evidence in defense of their tastes. Likewise, there would be no need to call upon experts to settle the dispute, because each person is more or less an expert with regard to how things taste to him or her at any given moment. Finally, if the goal is merely to describe or express, then we would not expect to see a normative aspect to disagreements—cases in which it looks like the conversational participants think their interlocutor should change his or her mind.

So while part of the point of disagreeing about taste may be to express or describe taste experiences, we have reason to think that sometimes there is more to it than that. In the following sections, I will try to articulate what more there is. I will give an explanation of the purpose of taste disagreements that makes sense of the persuasive and normative aspects of disagreement. In doing so, I hope to show

that the connection between matters of taste and subjectivity does not preclude the possibility of error in taste disagreements.

## 4.4 Why Disagree about Taste?

### 4.4.1 Coordination

What else could we be doing in a taste disagreement besides describing and expressing our tastes (or the tastes of the conversational participants)? I think that in addition to expressing and describing our tastes, we are also trying to *coordinate our tastes*. More specifically, I think we are trying to *coordinate our taste perspectives*, either by attempting to make our dispositions more similar to those of our fellow interlocutors or by trying to convince our fellow interlocutors to cultivate dispositions that are more similar to our own. The process of coordination is something disagreements about taste have in common with disagreements about empirical matters of fact. Often, part of what the individuals in empirical disagreements are trying to do is to coordinate their *epistemic perspectives*.<sup>23</sup>

When I say that part of what we are trying to do in taste disagreements is to coordinate our taste perspectives, I do not mean to say that coordination itself is the ultimate goal of taste disagreements. Perhaps coordination has some value in and of itself. If this is so, then there will be cases of taste disagreements and empirical disagreements in which coordination is itself the purpose of disagreement. However, in most cases some *reason* must exist for coordination, even if it is purely pragmatic.

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<sup>23</sup>There is some debate about how to characterize epistemic perspectives and what sort of beliefs epistemic perspectives should include. I will not go into details here about the exact characterization of an epistemic perspective. For now, we can represent an epistemic perspective as a credence function or collection of credence functions. There is no further restriction that these beliefs be cases of knowledge. In that case, it may be more appropriate to use the expression ‘doxastic perspective’ instead of ‘epistemic perspective.’ I will continue using ‘epistemic perspective’ here to remain consistent with the literature on the semantics of epistemic modals, a literature related in important ways to the semantics of taste.

In these cases, coordination is a means to obtaining some further value, and not itself the ultimate goal of the disagreement.

#### 4.4.2 Is taste coordination possible?

Before we discuss the value of taste coordination, we should ask whether taste coordination is even possible. Assuming that taste perspectives involve dispositions, we need to ask whether it is possible for us to alter our responses or reactions to a gustatory item.

I am assuming that our responses and reactions to a gustatory item include not only things like experiences but also things like beliefs and evaluations. So, although I have used the phrase “change of mind,” we should take this phrase to include changes in experiences as well as changes in beliefs or judgments. Our experiences, beliefs, and evaluations regarding a gustatory item all depend on many things. Because of this, there are a variety of ways to influence a person’s taste perspective.

##### 4.4.2.1 Changing your tastes

To begin with, our reactions and responses depend in part on our taste sensations. Given the sensation assumption, taste sensations themselves depend on a number of things, including the properties of the item being tasted, native physical and psychological makeup (what I will call *natural sensitivity*), the conditions under which an item is tasted (what I’ll call the *taste conditions*), and palate development (what I will call *gustatory training* or *gustatory education*). We have limited, if any, control over the properties of an item or over our natural sensitivity. Our natural sensitivity can change over time, but not usually in ways that are under our control.<sup>24</sup> For instance, we often become less sensitive as we grow older. However, we have some degree of control over taste conditions and over gustatory training. For instance, with regard to

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<sup>24</sup>There are some exceptions. For example, we could lessen our natural sensitivity by damaging our taste faculties, for instance by smoking.

environmental control, our taste sensations can be affected by the temperature of an item. We may experience more flavor when an item is brought to room temperature than we would have if it were chilled. Our taste sensations can also be affected by items we have tasted immediately before tasting that particular item. The experience we get from tasting coffee on its own is very different from the experience we get from tasting it immediately after sampling lemonade. With regard to gustatory training, there is no shortage of books and articles that explain how to develop our palates.<sup>25</sup> These texts encourage us to heighten our sensitivity or awareness by paying attention to what we are tasting, tasting often, tasting broadly, and so on. We will return to the issue of gustatory training in section 4.5 when we look at a theory of aesthetic training suggested by Peter Railton.

#### 4.4.2.2 Gustatory background

Of course, there are many other ways to influence someone's responses or reactions to an item that do not necessarily involve changing her taste sensations. For instance, each person has an experiential and doxastic background relating to taste. Your *gustatory background*, as I'll call it, includes things such as past experiences relating to gustatory items, memories or feelings you have associated with a gustatory item, past or current beliefs about the quality or origin of the item, and so on. Your gustatory background can do a great deal to affect your reactions and responses to a gustatory item. For instance, positive associations with an item, such as a happy childhood memory, might enhance your enjoyment of the item. On the other hand, negative associations with an item, such as a memory of sickness after eating this item, might decrease your enjoyment of the item or even foster disgust. Likewise, in a context in which someone has a limited selection of gustatory items or is especially hungry, an item might give more pleasure than it would if it were tasted in a context in

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<sup>25</sup>For example, see Lettie Teague (2007).

which someone had a large selection available or was sufficiently sated. For example, in normal circumstances, the taste of rotting oatmeal is not pleasant. However, in a situation in which someone is lost in the woods and starving to death, the taste of rotting food might be much more pleasurable.

The beliefs we have about an item can also affect our reactions and responses. For instance, discovering that a dish was made of rat intestines might alter a person's responses. It could also be that simply hearing about other people's preferences or evaluations could cause you to alter your own preferences or evaluations to some extent.

Not all of the experiences or information that make up our gustatory background are directly alterable—memories of past experiences, for instance. Although we cannot change the past, we can change how much it influences our current responses and reactions. For instance, we might be able to overcome a negative taste memory with several new positive associations. In that case, one way in which we can influence a person's taste perspective is to put their gustatory history in context by adding to the experience or information that makes up their gustatory background in one way or another.

A variety of *influencing factors* exist besides gustatory training and background, but in order to discuss these factors it will help to have a clearer picture of the value of taste coordination. I will say more about the factors that influence a taste perspective in section 4.7. For now, it is enough to note that it is possible for us to alter our responses and reactions to gustatory items, and hence to coordinate our taste perspectives.



### 4.4.3 Why coordinate?

#### 4.4.3.1 Questions about the value of epistemic coordination

Now that we have explored whether it is possible to coordinate our taste perspectives, we can return to asking about the purpose of coordination. What kind of value might we be trying to achieve by coordinating our taste perspectives? Here it will help to consider the purpose of epistemic coordination. John MacFarlane offers the following suggestion regarding disagreements involving epistemic modality:

In the case of epistemic states, it is manifestly in our interest to share a picture of the world, and to learn from others when they know things that we do not. (MacFarlane, 2007, p. 21)

Whose epistemic picture of the world is it in our interest to share? The answer depends on what our interests are. For instance, it might be in our interest to share a picture of the world because it would help us to get along better, to fit in with a social group, to make money, and so on. In these cases, it is *pragmatic value* that determines whose picture of the world it is in our interest to adopt. In some of these cases where pragmatic value is at issue, it may not even matter whose picture of the world we adopt so long as we share a picture of the world. Consider a case like (100), in which Mark and Stacie are utterly exhausted from arguing on their cross-country trip.

(100) Stacie: Jay Cutler plays for the Bears!

Mark: No, he doesn't. He plays for the Broncos!

It may be of great pragmatic value for Mark to concede to Stacie, even to the point of changing his belief. However, provided that it would be just as easy for Stacie to change her mind, then this pragmatic goal might be accomplished just as well if Stacie coordinated her beliefs with Mark's.

Pragmatic value alone can offer us some reason to change our minds in certain cases of empirical disagreement. However, as MacFarlane seems to suggest, a more objective reason exists for epistemic coordination. In many cases, it is in our interest to coordinate our picture of the world with that of our fellow interlocutor, so long as our fellow interlocutor has a more accurate view of the world than we do. Consider a case like (101), in which Stacie and Mark coordinate their beliefs about the direction of the finish line during an orienteering competition.

(101) Stacie: The finish line is to the north. The trail is much more worn in that direction.

Mark: No, the finish line isn't to the north. The map says that it's to the south.

Let's assume that the finish is actually to the south. If Stacie and Mark want to finish the race, then it is not in either of their interests to share Stacie's picture of the world. This is because in this case, although there is a pragmatic value involved (i.e., finishing the race) obtaining it depends on obtaining a kind of *epistemic value*: having true beliefs about the location of the finish line.

Although appealing to certain kinds of pragmatic value might help explain our behavior in certain kinds of disagreements about empirical matters of fact—cases like (100), for instance—it is the pursuit of epistemic value that best explains the persuasive and normative aspects of disagreements like (93).

#### 4.4.3.2 Questions about the value of taste coordination

What is the value of taste coordination? So as not to assume too much, we can call the kind of value that could motivate taste coordination *gustatory value*, to distinguish it for now from other kinds of value. Part of our project will be to discover the nature of gustatory value and how it relates to other kinds of values.

The value of taste coordination does not seem to be primarily epistemic, or at least it does not seem to have much to do with gaining knowledge of the world outside of our taste perspectives. In that case, gustatory value does not seem to be a kind of epistemic value, although we can leave it open as to whether having more true beliefs about the world could be a means for obtaining gustatory value. Could it be that gustatory value is connected with a kind of *pragmatic value*? Perhaps. There are all sorts of *practical reasons* we could have for coordinating our tastes. Here are just a few: it could save arguing over what to have for dinner, it could help us fit in culturally or socially with certain groups, it could even help us learn to tolerate a loved one's cooking! While these are all legitimate and compelling reasons to coordinate tastes, appealing to these sorts of reasons won't help us explain why, in many cases, one way of coordinating a taste perspective seems *better* than another way of coordinating. Consider (102) and (103).

(102) Student: Boone's Farm is tasty! I can't imagine drinking anything else.

Connoisseur: You're wrong. Boone's Farm isn't tasty. You need to branch out a bit, and you'll see what I mean.

(103) Ed: The fish sticks on campus are tasty. I could eat them for every meal.

Phil: I hate to break it to you, but the fish sticks on campus are really not tasty. You've just been in grad school so long that you've forgotten what real food tastes like.

Setting aside pragmatic reasons like social acceptance or financial concerns, we can ask: does the connoisseur have just as much reason to change her tastes as the student has to change his? Will Phil benefit just as much from changing his tastes as Ed will from changing his? If the answer to these questions is "no," then this points to there being a more objective value than the situationally based values I listed earlier. Again, I take it that a "no" answer to this question assumes that no

other additional pragmatic reasons influence coordination. For instance, if Phil loses his job and can only afford campus food, it may be in his interest to develop a taste for fish sticks. Likewise, if the student is worried about being made fun of by his fellow undergraduates for drinking a snooty wine, then perhaps he has reason not to develop a taste for it. However, the real question is whether there are reasons for coordinating one way or the other that do not rely on situationally determined types of pragmatic value. If there are, then although we can still make use of prudential values in explaining part of the motivation for taste coordination, adding a more objective source of value will give us a more unified explanation of the normative dimension of these cases. In the following sections I will present a theory of the purpose of disagreement that relies on a more objective source of gustatory value.

## 4.5 Aesthetic Value

Drawing on Hume's essay *On the Standard of Taste*, Peter Railton presents a theory of the grounds of *evaluative aesthetic judgments* that can help us discover a more objective source of gustatory value.<sup>26</sup> Railton speaks mainly about aesthetic taste—he focuses on beauty rather than tastiness—but his views about the nature of aesthetic value are easily applicable to *gustatory taste*.<sup>27</sup> Railton embraces something very much like the sensation assumption. He thinks that there are real, objective properties of certain objects in the world that reliably cause certain kinds of aesthetic experiences in us. Railton calls the properties that cause these experiences in us the *beauty-making characteristics*, and he calls the kinds of objects that have these prop-

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<sup>26</sup>See Hume (1757) and Railton (1998).

<sup>27</sup>Although Railton focuses on judgments of beauty rather than judgments of gustatory taste, he often follows Hume (1757) in using gustatory examples to illustrate his points. Insofar as it seems that Railton assumes that gustatory value is a kind of aesthetic value, perhaps he intends to give an account of both kinds of value simultaneously. Since I do not want to make any assumptions yet about the nature of gustatory value, I will treat it as being distinct from aesthetic value while noting that Railton might have intended to offer a unified explanation of the two.

erties *beautiful objects*. What kinds of experiences do beauty-making characteristics give rise to in the individuals who are sensitive to them? Railton thinks the answer is *intrinsically sought-after experiences*.

Which experiences are intrinsically sought after? Assuming that a more basic reason exists as to why some experiences are intrinsically sought after, a likely candidate for the source of their desirability is *pleasure*. Of course, it is debatable whether there is such a thing as an intrinsically sought-after experience, and also whether all and only intrinsically sought-after things are pleasurable. For our purposes, we will make use of the notion of pleasure while keeping in mind that, in the end, we may want to appeal to something broader. In addition, we ought to think of pleasure or intrinsic desirability as *a* source (or partial source) of aesthetic value while remaining neutral on whether it is the *only* (or complete) source of gustatory value.<sup>28</sup>

Railton thinks that some objects naturally fit with our faculties in such a way as to cause us pleasure. He calls this relation a *match*. Borrowing from Hume, Railton writes:

Let us call the relation of conformity between objects and general “organs or faculties of the mind,” such that the objects are by the structure of the mind...naturally calculated to give pleasure, a *match*.<sup>29</sup>

Although pleasure is a subjective experience of the individual, the relation between the object and the individual is objective. According to Railton’s view, there is a fact of the matter as to whether an object matches human sentiment.

At this point it seems natural to ask, “If aesthetic value is grounded in a certain match between the properties of objects and human experience, then why are matters

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<sup>28</sup>I think it is likely that gustatory value is something more complex than just pleasure. For instance, it may be that for some artifacts, gustatory value has something to do with skill or craftsmanship. Consider, for instance, the skills involved in “plating” food in a fine restaurant.

<sup>29</sup>(Railton, 1998, p. 67)

of taste debatable? After all, isn't each of us an expert when it comes to knowing what pleases us?" According to Railton, having expertise in what pleases us as individuals may not be enough to qualify any of us as aesthetic experts. This is because aesthetic value is not grounded in what is pleasurable for the individual alone. It is grounded in matches for *human beings in general*. Speaking of a characterization of beauty he traces to Hume, Railton writes:

I have attributed to Hume a functional characterization of beauty as a particular sort of *robust and general match* between objects or performances and widespread human sensory capacities and sentiment...that permits these objects and events to bring about intrinsically sought, perceptually based experiences in those that become acquainted with them.<sup>30</sup>

Not only is aesthetic value grounded in something broader than individual pleasure, it is also grounded in something more substantial than momentary pleasure. Railton elaborates on what he calls a *field of aesthetic value*:

There will be some things that excel in their match with our sensibilities, and that can become a source of *durable pleasure* or interest as familiarity grows, independently of otherwise large variations in personal experience, situation, or culture.<sup>31</sup>

According to Railton, the items that make for excellent matches are the sort of things that can act as reliable sources of pleasure. These are pleasures that are common across time and culture, pleasures we do not outgrow as we develop and refine our sensibilities. Speaking of beauty-making characteristics, Railton explains:

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<sup>30</sup>(Railton, 1998, p. 77).The emphasis here is mine.

<sup>31</sup>(Railton, 1998, p. 74). The emphasis here is mine.

These features engage our sensory and cognitive capacities and our sentiments in ways we find intrinsically enjoyable, and the more deeply and intensely so upon greater familiarity and broader experience.<sup>32</sup>

Railton thinks any of us, or even many of us, could be misled about what things robustly or durably match our sensibilities.<sup>33</sup> This kind of error has a variety of causes. For instance, we may lack a natural sensitivity, we may be overly influenced by aesthetic trends, or we may lack experience or understanding. However, Railton thinks some people are less likely to err in these ways. These *expert judges*, as Railton calls them, are especially good at judging which things will be robust and durable sources of pleasure. How does one become an expert judge? In part, expertise has to do with how *naturally sensitive* one is to beauty-making characteristics. But it is also a matter of developing one's sensibilities by undergoing a kind of *aesthetic training*. Those who are aesthetically well-trained have had *extensive practice* with aesthetic items; they have built a *comparative base* by experiencing a wide range of items. Finally, being an aesthetic expert involves diligence in following certain *epistemic principles*. For instance, being an expert judge means that you utilize your natural sensitivity and training when making evaluative aesthetic judgments. Furthermore, since aesthetic value is grounded in something broader than what is pleasing for an individual or a culture, Railton thinks that the judgments of aesthetic experts must be *free from personal, cultural, and sociological biases*.

Although experts are more likely to be in tune with what is robustly and durably pleasurable to human beings, they are not infallible. However, when experts coordinate their beliefs, they increase their reliability. Perhaps it is because of this

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<sup>32</sup>(Railton, 1998, p. 76)

<sup>33</sup>I hope not to misinterpret Railton by referring to “robust and durable matches” or “robust and durable pleasures.” It could be that Railton thinks that only matches are more or less robust and that their robustness is due to how durable the pleasure associated with them is.

phenomenon that Railton follows Hume in saying that the “joint verdict” of expert judges determines an independent standard of aesthetic goodness, or *standard of aesthetic taste*.<sup>34</sup> However, rather than interpreting Hume as saying that a standard of taste is determined by the joint verdict of expert judges, Railton takes Hume to be arguing that the joint verdict of expert judges serves as a guide to or evidence of an objective standard of taste.<sup>35</sup>

While some things make for better matches than others, in some cases it is metaphysically indeterminate whether one item is a better match than another. This is in part because matches are, according to Railton, *genre-specific* to some extent. So while the music of Coltrane and the music of Beethoven are both beautiful, it could be that neither one of them provides a better overall fit with human faculties.

## 4.6 Gustatory Value

### 4.6.1 Motivating taste coordination

We can straightforwardly apply much of Railton’s theory of aesthetic value to help understand the nature of gustatory value. In order to explain fully our behavior in taste disagreements, we will need to rethink some of Railton’s account. I will discuss modifications in section 4.7, but for now we will look at how Railton’s account can help us begin to answer questions about the purpose of coordinating our taste perspectives.

To begin with, the idea of a match between human sentiment and certain items in the world is just as plausible, if not more so, for gustatory taste as it is for beauty. Here we might recognize gustatory parallels for beauty-making characteristics and

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<sup>34</sup>See Hume (1757).

<sup>35</sup>I am not certain that Railton would agree that a standard of taste is determined by the joint verdict of the experts because coordination among experts increases reliability.



beautiful objects: *tasty-making characteristics* and *tasty objects*.<sup>36</sup> By possessing tasty-making characteristics, tasty objects fit with our faculties in such a way as to cause us *gustatory pleasure*.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, the suggestion that the source of aesthetic value has something to do with intrinsically sought-after experiences carries over well to the gustatory case. If gustatory value is linked to intrinsically sought-after experiences, in particular to gustatory pleasure, then this helps explain the intuition that tastiness is closely connected with our gustatory preferences and evaluations.

#### 4.6.2 A standard of taste

If there were a standard of gustatory taste that mirrored Railton's standard of aesthetic taste, this could help us explain why it sometimes seems that one way of coordinating a taste perspective is better than another. As Railton says:

[This account] can help us to understand why some judgments or tastes could be better based or more authoritative than others, and it points us to specific ways in which such authority or grounding can be gained. In matters of taste, we show some deference—in ourselves and in seeking the opinion of others—to preferences based upon greater knowledge, wider experience, and finer discrimination.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>What are the tasty-making characteristics? Unfortunately, this is a question best saved for another time. One option is to look to the literature on aesthetic value for ideas. For instance, perhaps balance, complexity, novelty, and the like are among the tasty-making characteristics. For more on the topic of aesthetic value, see Beardsley (1982).

<sup>37</sup>Is gustatory pleasure a special kind of pleasure? My first thought is to say that we ought to think of gustatory pleasure as restricted to the kinds of pleasure we obtain through tasting edible items. I hope to explore more fully the nature of gustatory pleasure and its relation to other kinds of pleasure in future work.

<sup>38</sup>(Railton, 1998, p. 89)

If there is an independent standard of gustatory taste, then it makes sense to defer to those whose tastes are more in line with this standard—those with more *gustatory expertise*.

Of course, some people could care less about following expert advice. Is there something incoherent or irrational about the behavior of such people? Railton thinks there is not. He explains that their mistake is more like a missed opportunity than an epistemic error.

Where, if anywhere, have they gone wrong? We see them, I think, as missing something, as partially blind. It would not be uncommon for us to say that such people have a good reason to pay more attention to aesthetic matters. What they fail to appreciate is something very much worth having.<sup>39</sup>

Putting all of this together, we see how Railton’s framework can help us begin to understand why it is sometimes in our interest to change our tastes. One very broad reason is that, in certain cases, failing to do so could cause us to miss out on an important source of gustatory value: gustatory pleasure.<sup>40</sup>

### 4.6.3 Gustatory obligation

So far, I have focused on explaining why we sometimes have a motivating reason to change our tastes. I want to address briefly the question of gustatory obligation. Do we ever have an *obligation* to coordinate our tastes? This question is difficult to answer because it relies on much bigger questions about the relationship between

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<sup>39</sup>(Railton, 1998, p. 72)

<sup>40</sup>What kind of value is gustatory value? In order to say what kind of value gustatory value is, we would have to know more about the nature and source of other kinds of value. For instance, it could turn out that the ultimate source of positive moral value is pleasure, in which case gustatory value and moral value would have the same source. I will leave it open for now whether gustatory value is reducible to or connected with another kind of value, such as epistemic value, aesthetic value, pragmatic value, or moral value.

value and obligation. For example, we have to ask to what extent, if any, obligation is connected to value. If it turns out that gustatory value is linked to obligation, then to what kind of obligation is it linked? Is gustatory value linked to *conditional obligation* or *unconditional obligation*? We also have to ask questions about the nature of obligation itself. For instance, if it turns out that we have very limited control over the extent to which we can change our tastes, are we obligated to change them? In other words, does ‘ought’ imply ‘can’ in cases of taste?

I will not try to answer these questions in any detail here. Perhaps the best thing to say for now is that we have at most a (heavily qualified) conditional obligation to change our perspectives.<sup>41</sup> If we can change our perspectives, and if changing our perspectives really would lead to a better pleasure, and if we are interested in the kind of pleasure that would result from the change, then we have an obligation to change.<sup>42</sup>

## 4.7 Changes and Additions

Borrowing Railton’s notion of a match helps us begin to explain the persuasive and normative aspects of taste disagreements. However, a full explanation requires us to depart in a number of ways from Railton’s account, or add to some of his ideas. First, we need to allow for a kind of match that is characterized by something more idiosyncratic than a fit with general human sentiment. Second, we ought to consider expanding the relativity of matches to something beyond just species and genre.

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<sup>41</sup>Thanks to Phil Bricker for convincing me that gustatory obligations, if they exist, are most likely conditional obligations.

<sup>42</sup>How do gustatory obligations, if they exist, compare to or interact with other kinds of obligation such as moral obligation? Again, the answer to this question depends on questions about the nature of other kinds of obligation. For instance, if Hedonism is true, and the source of moral value is pleasure, and gustatory value is based (in part) on a kind of pleasure (gustatory pleasure), then gustatory pleasure could be one factor among many that must to be taken into account when considering moral value.

Finally, we should rethink what determines the goodness of a match—in particular, whether robustness and durability are the right metrics for determining the goodness of matches.

#### 4.7.1 General versus local matches

As Railton acknowledges, we might be skeptical that there is, in fact, enough similarity between human beings, even among those with similar sensibilities and training, to allow for an actual field of aesthetic, or for our purposes gustatory, value. But even if there is enough similarity to underlie the existence of *general matches*, as I will call them, they play at most only a partial role in motivating taste coordination. There seem to be many cases of persuasive disagreement in which one or more of the participants are aware that their preferences are both idiosyncratic and in conflict with the standards set by expert judges. Consider (104), for example.

(104) Lily: I read a review that said there is nothing tasty to eat at the state fair.

Jacob: That's not true. I know there aren't many people who would agree with me (especially food critics), but deep-fried Oreos are really tasty!

If disagreements about taste were merely attempts to put someone in touch with items that could serve as robust and durable sources of pleasure to human beings in general, then Jacob's claim would be odd because he knows his tastes are in conflict with those of the general experts.

To account for these kinds of cases, it will be useful to recognize matches to more individual sentiment as opposed to general human sentiment, the type of sentiment Hume called *peculiar sentiment*.<sup>43</sup> We can call these sorts of matches *local matches* to distinguish them from the *general matches* of Railton's account.

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<sup>43</sup>Hume (1757).

**General matches:** objects that provide pleasure for the majority of members of a local species.

**Local matches:** objects that provide pleasure to individuals with a certain kind of natural sensitivity and a certain kind of gustatory background.

Along the same lines, we should distinguish *general gustatory experts* from *local gustatory experts*.<sup>44</sup>

**General gustatory experts:** individuals who are good at detecting general matches.

**Local gustatory experts:** individuals who are skilled in detecting local matches, matches for those who are similar to themselves.

General gustatory matches determine a *general gustatory standard of taste*, and it is the general experts who are most knowledgeable about or sensitive to that standard. However, local matches determine a *local standard of gustatory taste*, and local experts are most knowledgeable about or sensitive to that standard. Which standard of taste it is appropriate to appeal to in order to settle a dispute—either general or local—will depend on which kind of match, if any, the disagreement aims at. I will return to this point in section 4.7.1.3, but first we have to discuss the notion of similarity.

#### 4.7.1.1 Similarity and expertise

Because the notion of similarity plays a crucial role in the definition of local expertise, it is worth taking a moment to discuss what similarity involves. First, it is important to note that local or general gustatory experts do not actually need to be

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<sup>44</sup>If there are such things as local matches in addition to general matches, does this mean that there are two kinds of gustatory value? As of now, I have no answer to that question, though I hope to pursue the answer at another time.

similar to those to whom they testify. All that is necessary is that gustatory experts are able to *project* themselves in the place of someone else such that they can form reliable beliefs about what kinds of things would be pleasurable to such a person. In that case, even someone with no sense of taste might be able to know on the basis of observation and testimony what sorts of things are pleasurable to another human being. Likewise, a human being might use projection to determine what things are pleasurable to another species.

Second, it is important to get clear on what kinds of similarity matter for local experts. As the definition of local matches suggests, at least two broad kinds of similarity matter: natural sensitivity and gustatory background. Many factors influence the pleasure you get from an item, and hence must factor into the recommendations of a local expert. Furthermore, some these factors are manipulable while some are not. Local experts have to be aware of both types of factors. A local expert may challenge an individual to change their tastes in cases where such a change would allow that individual better access to pleasure. However, there will always be physical limits on how much an individual is able to change. There is little point to challenging an individual to change when change is not possible. Local gustatory experts are aware of what features are unalterable, and they judge what is pleasurable for an individual given those restrictions.

For example, although local gustatory experts are good at detecting matches for people with similar capacities and natural sensitivities—people who are “built similarly” to themselves—there are limits to the malleability of these features. Although some aspects of an individual’s natural sensitivity can be cultivated, many features cannot be altered. For instance, for genetic reasons, certain individuals lack the ability to discern the presence of certain bitter compounds, such as phenylthiocarbamide, in

foods.<sup>45</sup> No amount of gustatory training could alter the results of this genetic trait, and hence there could be no point in persuading an individual to try to change her tastes in this case. Local gustatory experts must keep these sorts of unalterable facts about an individual's natural sensitivity in mind when making their judgements.

Likewise, although local gustatory experts are good at detecting matches for people with similar gustatory backgrounds, some background factors are relevant while some are not. Again, a gustatory background is composed of things like personal and cultural beliefs and experiences. Although many components of a person's background can be influenced, some aspects will inevitably resist alteration. For instance, it may be that an individual's tastes are so deeply influenced by the range of gustatory items available in her culture that this limits the extent to which she could ever take pleasure in consuming certain items. Local gustatory experts are required to take such limits into consideration as well.

#### 4.7.1.2 Positive and negative biases

Allowing local experts to be influenced by gustatory backgrounds stands in contrast to Railton's requirements for general experts. Again, Railton argues that general gustatory experts need to avoid "biases" such as personal experience and cultural background when making aesthetic (or gustatory) judgments. This is because general matches are a matter of what is pleasurable to humans in general, not to individuals from a particular culture or with a particular gustatory background. However, there is good reason for local gustatory experts to consider personal and cultural background when making gustatory judgments: these factors can affect the pleasure one derives from tasting an item. Call these factors *positive biases*. Of course, not all biases are positive. There are some *negative biases* that local gustatory experts should avoid. Negative biases include factors that could influence a person's judgment but do not

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<sup>45</sup>See Korsmeyer (1999) for an interesting discussion of issues relating to "the science of taste."

make a difference with regard to pleasure. For example, it would be important for a local gustatory expert to be free of prejudices held merely as a result of social influence, assuming such an influence did not affect the amount of pleasure associated with an item.

Of course, we might worry that, as I've defined things, the distinction between positive and negative won't necessarily be clear cut. For instance, can't factors like social influence affect how much pleasure an individual receives from an item? If they can, then it seems like they should no longer be considered to be a negative bias. At this point, it becomes difficult to draw a line between positive and negative biases. One way to handle this complication is to distinguish between pleasures that result solely from properties of the object itself and not from external factors. However, there are problems with that approach. External factors often influence how much pleasure we get from an item. For instance, even things like information about price may affect the pleasure we get from tasting an item. For example, a recent study conducted by California Institute of Technology and Stanford University seems to suggest that beliefs about the price of wine not only influenced how much pleasure individuals reported experiencing from tasting the wine, but it also affected neural paths. MRIs registered the effect in the area of the brain thought to encode pleasure.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps the best way to distinguish a positive bias from a negative one is not merely that a positive bias enhances pleasure, but that it enhances pleasure in a reliable way. For instance, although social influence or price might temporarily influence how much pleasure we get from an item. However, because these factors often fluctuate unpredictably, they might not positively influence pleasure in a reliable way.

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<sup>46</sup>See Svitil, 2008, for a report on this study.



### 4.7.1.3 The role of local matches versus the role of general matches

One final thing we need to think about as we compare local and general matches is whether taste coordination is motivated primarily by the pursuit of local matches or general matches. In my view, local matches provide the main impetus for taste coordination (at least for those cases of coordination in which other kinds of pragmatic motivations are not at play). Listening to a local gustatory expert can directly affect the pleasure experienced by a person. For instance, hearing the testimony of a local gustatory expert could give someone a reason to develop his or her palate because it would increase the pleasure he or she gets from tasting an item, or put that person in touch with a new or better source of gustatory pleasure.

However, general matches might still play a role in motivating taste coordination. Hearing the testimony of a general gustatory expert may cause us to change our beliefs about what is a good match for human beings in general. If we believe we are built similarly enough to other human beings, we may have reason to develop our palates in a manner suggested by a general expert. Of course, if a person's capacities or background diverge enough from other humans, then what makes for a good general match will not make for a good local match. However, even this sort of individual may have reason to develop his or her tastes in the manner suggested by a general gustatory expert. For instance, it may be socially or otherwise pragmatically valuable in some way, if not gustatorily valuable, to bring one's tastes in line with those of general experts.<sup>47</sup>

### 4.7.2 The relativity of matches

The second set of modifications concerns the relativity of matches. As we have already discussed, Railton considers matches to be relative to a species and to a genre. However, we may also want to recognize additional relativizing factors such

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<sup>47</sup>Railton suggests that there is a social value connected with sharing the tastes of your community.

as *contextual features*. Things that make for a very good match in one context might not make for a good match in another context. I will leave open for now what sort of contextual features matter for matches while mentioning two possibilities. One such feature is *location*. For example, in the context of a picnic lunch, Kool-Aid might be a reasonably good match, whereas in the context of a chic restaurant, Kool-Aid might not be as good a match. Another contextual feature is *availability*. In the context of a beer bar in which there are a large number of beers on tap, Budweiser might not be a very good match. However, at a local pizza joint with only a few beers on tap, Budweiser might be a relatively good match. Much more needs to be said about relativity with regard to context, but these examples give us an idea of the role of contextual factors in determining the goodness of matches. If it turns out that either local or general matches are relative to a variety of factors, we should require that tasters, especially gustatory experts, take these factors into account when making their judgments.

#### 4.7.2.1 Worries about relativity

In discussing the relativity of matches, it may seem that I have begun to invoke a kind of a relativity of value. For good reason, value relativism is controversial, even more controversial than semantic relativism—a kind of semantic theory that would posit relative truth conditions for expressions such as ‘tasty.’

I could argue that although I talk of ‘relativizing’ factors, I am not really arguing for a kind of value relativism—at least no more than any hedonist is. On the view I suggest, there is an objective reason why an item is gustatorily valuable, and this reason is at least partially determined by the fact that it causes pleasure.<sup>48</sup> The fact

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<sup>48</sup>I say “partially determined” because, again, I do not intend to give a complete account of the nature of gustatory value. I think gustatory value has something to do with pleasure, but there may be other contributing factors besides pleasure.

that several factors, including species, genre, and context, affect how pleasurable an item is to someone does not make gustatory value any less objective.

However, even if one were to insist that my view supports a kind of value relativism, this would not be a mark against it. True, in the beginning I said that we needed to find a “more objective” reason for taste coordination. But the reason we needed a “more objective” reason for taste coordination was to explain cases such as (103) in which there seems to be a right way of coordinating. Even if value is relative to things such as species, genre, context, and the like, we can still explain why we often have the intuition that there is one right way to coordinate: there is one right way to coordinate given a species, genre, and context. Furthermore, we should not be too frightened by relativism in this case. Presumably, some kinds of value relativism are less worrisome than others. For instance, I take it that it is relatively unproblematic (fitting, even) to think of social values as relative to something like societies. I think it is similarly unproblematic to think of gustatory value as relative to things such as species, context, and genre.

### **4.7.3 Determining the goodness of a match**

The final set of modifications concerns what determines the goodness of matches. The way I have interpreted Railton, good matches are determined by the robustness and durability of the pleasure connected to them. Robust and durable pleasures are those that become more intense the more familiar we are with an item and the more experience we have with gustatory items in general.<sup>49</sup>

Are there such things as robust and durable sources of gustatory pleasure? In the gustatory case, it is tempting to interpret robustness and durability as meaning that we would never reach a point of satiety with regard to an item. It is hard to believe

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<sup>49</sup>As we have seen, Railton seemed to think that the goodness of matches was marked by how well they transcend time and culture. I will leave this issue aside for now.

that there could be any items, no matter how pleasant, that we wouldn't grow tired of if we experienced them in excess. Crème brûlée is divine on occasion, but eat it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and it goes from delectable to disgusting very quickly.

However, this is not the way we ought to think about robustness and durability, or rather, we should not think that this is what Railton was trying to get at when he invoked robustness and durability. To make things easier, we can withdraw the requirement that the pleasure increase in intensity. The idea behind robustness and durability seems to be this: as time goes by, we inevitably gain more gustatory experience and, as a result, some items lose their luster as we expand our horizons. On the other hand, some items, provided we have not gone beyond the point of satiation, continue to please us, and may even please us more as time goes by. Let's call these items *reliable sources of pleasure*. Reliable sources of pleasure are those that can be relied upon to yield consistent (or increasing) pleasures the more familiarity we have with that particular item and with gustatory items in general. They are sources of pleasures that are unaffected by passing fad or fancy. The way I have characterized *reliability*, it is a property of the object tasted and not of the match between the object and the individual. Reliability is important, because it marks a good source for matches. However, we still need a way of determining the goodness of the match itself.

I will assume that the goodness of matches is determined by the goodness of the pleasure associated with the match—the better the pleasure, the better the match. Now the question is simply how to measure gustatory pleasures. We can weigh and calculate pleasures in a roughly Millian way. The details of such a system are beyond the scope of this paper, but the larger picture is a familiar one. For instance, in calculating pleasure, we ought to consider the *intensity* as well as the *duration* of the pleasure. All things considered, more intense gustatory pleasures are better than less

intense gustatory pleasures, and gustatory pleasures that have a longer duration are better than those with a shorter duration.

There might also be reason for us to recognize different types of gustatory pleasure: *intellectual pleasure* as well as *sensual pleasure*. Intellectual gustatory pleasures may include things such as the comparatively complex pleasure of noticing the notes of a fine wine. Sensual gustatory pleasures may include things such as the relatively simple pleasure of eating raw sugar. Is one type of pleasure better than the other? Of course, a complete answer to that question relies on answering deeper axiological questions—questions that, again, are beyond the scope of this paper. It would be difficult to argue that a more intellectual pleasure of noticing the notes of a fine wine is objectively better than the more sensual pleasure of tasting pure sugar, or vice versa. One option is to say that one kind of pleasure is better than another, though not objectively so. Because of this, we could say the individual's preferences determine whether intellectual pleasure is better than sensual pleasure *for her*. There is some motivation for this view. After all, with local matches our concern is with what is valuable from the perspective of the individual. Taking this route, however, forces us to give up on the objectivity of matches. Perhaps the best way to go, if we want to hold on to objectivity, is to propose that, although one kind of pleasure is not better than another, the best gustatory state includes both kinds of pleasure. On this view, a taster who could experience both kinds of pleasure is better off than a taster who experiences only one or the other.

## 4.8 Conclusion

I began this chapter with a puzzle: how can we make sense of a wide variety of taste disagreements? When we looked at some cases of taste disagreement, it seemed that the participants often failed to offer much evidence for their positions or to appeal to experts to resolve their disputes. The disputes often appeared to be faultless

in some sense, and it looked as though these debates were sometimes irresolvable both in principle and in practice. With these cases, it was natural for us to suppose that the subjectivity of taste, which presumably precludes the possibility of error, was responsible for these features. However, when we looked at other cases, it appeared that the conversational participants often did offer evidence for their positions—evidence that seems designed to persuade their fellow interlocutors. They frequently appealed to experts and to intersubjective agreement to resolve their disputes, and they sometimes proceeded as if there were normative constraints on the debate. In these cases, it seemed that there was some sense in which at least one of the participants was at fault. It also appeared that some of these disagreements were resolvable both in principle and in practice. I suggested that in order to explain these kinds of cases, we needed a theory of the purpose of taste disagreements—a theory that did not assume that the subjectivity of taste left no room for error in these debates.

Before I presented my theory of the purpose of taste disagreements, I tried to clarify why we might be tempted to think that the subjectivity of taste precluded error. I said that the worry was that judgments about taste were based solely on an individual's taste perspective: his disposition to react or respond to taste sensations or the gustatory items that give rise to these sensations. Here the intuition was that there is no right answer to what dispositions we ought to have regarding taste. I went on to describe one ultimately unsuccessful explanation of the purpose of taste disagreements that tried to capture this intuition: that the purpose of taste disagreements was for the participants to express or describe their tastes. I argued that this sort of explanation failed to accommodate cases of ongoing taste disagreements, as well as cases of taste disagreements that demonstrate either persuasive or normative features.

Next I presented my own theory about the purpose of taste disagreements. I acknowledged that, although there could be many reasons to disagree about taste, one important purpose is the pursuit of gustatory value: gustatory pleasure. I argued

that one method for pursuing gustatory pleasure was for an individual to coordinate her taste perspective with the taste perspective of someone with more gustatory expertise. I provided several examples designed to show that, in many cases, there is a fact of the matter as to who has more gustatory expertise and hence a fact of the matter as to the best way to coordinate taste perspectives. I looked to Peter Railton's theory of aesthetic value as a template for an objective theory of gustatory value. From Railton I borrowed, among other things, the notion of a match, which is the relationship of fit between a gustatory item and human sentiment. An item is a match when it gives us pleasure. Some matches are better than others because some pleasures are better than others. I argued that the goodness of pleasure should be calculated in terms of intensity and duration. The items that make for the best matches are those that are reliable sources of pleasure—items that provide pleasure that does not decrease and may even increase as time goes by and we gain more experience of gustatory items. It is possible for an individual to be mistaken about what things make for good matches. Gustatory experts are individuals who, because of their gustatory training, are less likely to err with respect to their judgments about matches.

I distinguished between general matches, which are a matter of fit between a gustatory item and general human sentiment, and local matches, which are a matter of fit between gustatory items and individuals with specific sensitivities and a specific gustatory background. I argued that local matches provide the main motivation for taste coordination, though general matches can still play a role. I claimed that local matches provide the grounds for a local standard of taste. In disagreements in which local matches are at issue, it is this standard that determines who is mistaken. I also argued for the existence of local experts in addition to general experts. While general experts are skilled in detecting matches for their species, local experts are individuals who are skilled in detecting matches for people with similar natural sensitivity and a

similar gustatory background. Although a local gustatory expert need not be literally similar to her fellow interlocutor, she must be able to successfully project herself into the position of someone with particular sensitivities and a particular gustatory background.

In chapter 5, I will argue that this account of the purpose of taste disagreements can explain the existence of error, the appeal to experts, the use of evidence, the presence of irresolvability, and the sense in which disagreements about taste can involve both fault and faultlessness. Once I have solved the paradox, I will discuss what bearing the resolution has on the debate surrounding the semantics of taste.



## CHAPTER 5

### SOLVING THE PUZZLE OF GUSTATORY TASTE

#### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that the real puzzle of taste disagreement involves explaining both simple and substantive cases of taste disagreement. Because this is a task that involves explaining seemingly conflicting intuitions, I called this new puzzle the “Paradox of Gustatory Taste” (the Paradox of Taste for short).<sup>1</sup> I argued that solving the Paradox of Taste required giving an account of the grounds of taste disagreement—in particular, of gustatory value.

In this chapter, I will show how my theory of the purpose of taste disagreements, including my theory of gustatory value, can be used to solve the Paradox of Taste. I argue that because the disagreement data can be accommodated independently of the semantics by a meta-aesthetic theory, the disagreement data plays no role in determining the correct semantics of predicates of personal taste. If I am right, this discovery represents a substantial contribution to the dialectic because it offers philosophers and linguists decisive motivation to discontinue their reliance on disagreement data in the debate about the semantics of predicates of personal taste.

In section (5.2), I will review the original puzzle of faultless disagreement along with the three solutions to the problem, which I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. I will then introduce a new puzzle of disagreement: The Paradox of Taste. In sections (5.3)

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<sup>1</sup>Calling this puzzle a ‘paradox’ is a bit misleading because it does not involve a genuine logical paradox. I have chosen this name to reflect the Paradox of Aesthetic Taste discussed in Kant and Hume. See Hume, 1757. Kant, 1790. See also Schellekens, 2009 for a summary of the historic origins and the contemporary debate about the paradox of aesthetic taste.

and (5.4) I will briefly review my account of gustatory value from Chapter 4, and show how it plays a role in explaining the purpose of taste disagreements. In particular, I will discuss the various purposes of taste disagreements, and show how gustatory value may be connected to coordination in taste disagreements. In sections (5.5)-(5.7), I will use my theory of the purpose of taste disagreements to solve the paradox of taste. Finally, in section (5.8), I will conclude by arguing that taste disagreements play no role in determining the correct semantics of taste.

## **5.2 Review of the Semantic Debate**

### **5.2.1 The original puzzle of faultless disagreement**

Because the previous chapter focused solely on meta-aesthetic issues rather than semantic ones, it is worthwhile to refresh our memories of the dialectic up to this point. In chapter 1, I reviewed initial solutions to the semantic puzzle posed by taste disagreements. Early semantic approaches to predicates of personal taste focused on capturing simple cases of taste disagreement. Baseline contextualism held that the participants in a taste disagreement utter different yet compatible propositions describing his or her individual tastes. Baseline contextualism could allow for a kind of faultlessness: both individuals in a taste disagreement say something true. However, it could not straightforwardly accommodate retraction and eavesdropping. Furthermore, the baseline contextualist solution struggled to explain how disagreements about taste could be meaningful—a problem I called The Problem of Talking Past. Baseline relativism promised to do better than contextualism with regard to taste disagreements, but it encountered problems of its own. Baseline relativism could semantically allow for retraction and eavesdropping, but it wasn't clear how these phenomena could be motivated if truth is relative to judges. It was also difficult to see how disagreement itself could be motivated on a relativist picture. This difficulty with explaining the purpose of taste disagreements (including the purpose

of retraction and eavesdropping), is what I called The Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement. Although relativists used the phenomenon of faultless disagreement to motivate a radical shift in the semantics of predicates of personal taste, it became clear that they were not entitled to do so with the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement hanging overhead. In that case, the debate about the semantics of taste appeared to be at a standstill with regard to faultless disagreement.

Both the Problem of Talking Past and The Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement are essentially puzzles about how disagreement can be meaningful given the proposed semantics. For solutions to these problems, I turned to three accounts that offer this kind of explanation: Tamina Stephenson's hybrid approach, John MacFarlane's radical version of relativism, and Jonathan Schaffer's flexible brand of contextualism.<sup>2</sup>

### 5.2.2 Stephenson

I began by looking at Stephenson's view in Chapter 2. According to Stephenson, predicates of personal taste have two argument places, the first of which represents a person whose taste or experience is relevant. The first argument place can take a silent pronominal  $PRO_J$  that refers to the judge. If it does, then 'tasty' is judge dependent. The first argument place can also take either a preposition such as 'for  $x$ ' or a phonetically null referential pronoun that refers to a contextually salient individual. In that case, 'tasty' is not judge dependent. In order to explain the purpose of taste disagreements, Stephenson pairs her semantic approach with a pragmatic solution to the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement and the Problem of Talking Past that is based on Stalnaker's (1978) theory of conversation and common ground. She augments Stalnaker's theory by making the context set a set of world-time-judge triples. She proposes that the 'judge' for all of the world-time-judge triples of the context set represents the group of participants in the conversation. The main purpose of a

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<sup>2</sup>Stephenson (2007); MacFarlane (2005), (2007); and (2009a), Schaffer (2009).

taste disagreement in her view is to narrow down the set of world-time-judge triples that represents the taste experiences of the group of conversational participants (or conversely, to keep this set from being narrowed). The point is for the group to locate where they stand with regard to how something tastes.

In assessing Stephenson's approach, I distinguished between two basic types of taste disagreements: descriptive and persuasive. In descriptive taste disagreements, the primary goal is to inform the conversational participants about someone's tastes.<sup>3</sup> In persuasive disagreements, the primary goal is to change someone's taste. I argued that normative disagreements were a subcategory of persuasive disagreements. In normative disagreements, one or more of the conversational participants thinks that his or her interlocutor ought to change his or her tastes. Not all persuasive disagreements will be normative ones. For instance, there may be cases of taste disagreements in which a person wants her interlocutor to change his or her position, but where that person doesn't think that her interlocutor ought to change his or her position. Finally, there can also be mixed cases in which one participant has a persuasive or normative aim, while the other has a descriptive aim.<sup>4</sup>

I argued that although Stephenson's account could capture many cases of descriptive disagreements, it left persuasive disagreements—especially substantive ones—unexplained. This included explaining retraction, eavesdropping, offering evidence, and appeal to experts (including individuals outside of the group of conversational participants). This was because the explanation Stephenson gives for explaining such phenomena in a related type of expression, epistemic modals, involves appealing to

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<sup>3</sup>I have left open the possibility that there might be expressive disagreements, in which the goal of the disagreement is merely for the participants to express their tastes. For the sake of simplicity, I include expressive disagreements under descriptive disagreements, though expressive disagreements might deserve their own category.

<sup>4</sup>As I will argue below, if the participants do not coordinate their aims, they may end up talking past one another.

mistaken beliefs—a strategy Stephenson worried can not be applied predicates of personal taste because of their supposed subjectivity.

### 5.2.3 MacFarlane

After arguing that Stephenson’s solution to the puzzle of disagreement was incomplete, I turned to John MacFarlane’s radical brand of relativism in Chapter 2 to see if it fared any better. According to MacFarlane, sentences containing predicates of personal taste are true or false relative to the person assessing the truth of the sentence rather than the person who utters it. MacFarlane’s view has been referred to as “radical relativism” because truth is relative not only to the context of utterance that sets the world and time parameters, but also to a separate context of assessment that determines the judge parameter.

Solving the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement is even more pressing for radical relativism because, on this view, the very same utterance may be true relative to one context of assessment but false relative to another. In that case, it is difficult to see what would be the point of making an assertion when your utterance may be false relative to the context of assessment occupied by your interlocutor. In response to this challenge, MacFarlane argues that this sort of problem only arises when we assume a traditional characterization of the role of truth as the ‘aim of assertion.’<sup>5</sup> MacFarlane notes that this characterization of the role of truth seems inappropriate for relative truth because it is unclear what it would mean to aim at truth if truth is relative to assessors. If we assume that the goal of a disagreement is to aim at truth, then of course it seems pointless to disagree in cases where truth is relative. Knowing this, MacFarlane offers a new set of assertoric norms—ones that focus on the commitments a speaker makes in asserting an “assessment-sensitive” proposition. I argued that although thinking of assertion in terms of commitments is a step towards

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<sup>5</sup>See Dummett (1959) for an explanation of truth as the aim of assertion.

solving the Problem of Inappropriate Disagreement, it does not fully explain the purpose of taste disagreement. In particular, it didn't explain normative cases of disagreement—cases of disagreement where at least one of the participants thinks the interlocutor ought to change his or her mind. I claimed that on MacFarlane's account it remains unclear what could motivate speakers to take on the sort of commitments MacFarlane says they do. I suggested that in order for MacFarlane's solution to work, he must offer an explanation of the norms that underlie speaker commitments in taste disagreements.

MacFarlane proposes that coordination is behind speaker commitment and is driven by pragmatic reasons—in particular, social value. I argued that while social value can explain some cases of normative disagreement, it cannot explain all of them. I offered several cases in which there was a fact of the matter as to the right way to coordinate, but that the norms were not pragmatically determined. I suggested that we needed to look for a more objective kind of value to explain these cases.

#### **5.2.4 Schaffer**

Finally, in Chapter 3 I considered a flexible version of contextualism presented by Jonathan Schaffer. Of all of the accounts I considered, Schaffer's account was the best at handling a wide range of disagreement data. In Schaffer's account, taste disagreements are essentially descriptions of an individual's or group's tastes. In that case, epistemic norms determine who is right in taste disagreements. Schaffer's view—"meaning perspectivalism"—states that predicates of personal taste are two-place predicates of the form 'tasty *to x*.' The second place represents an experiencer argument that is filled in by context when it is not explicit. What is unique about Schaffer's account is that it is not paired with a rule that specifies whose perspective is relevant in each case. Instead, context supplies an experiencer argument in a

“non-constant way.”<sup>6</sup> Schaffer argues that the Problem of Talking past really only applies to the simplest versions of contextualism—ones that are inflexible with regard to whose perspective is specified.<sup>7</sup> He suggests that meaning perspectivalism is uniquely equipped to handle the disagreement data because it has built-in flexibility with regard to whose perspective is represented by the proposition. This sort of flexibility allows that taste disagreements vary in topic to a certain extent. For instance, a taste disagreement might be about establishing the tastes of a contextually salient individual, the tastes of a group, or even the taste of the average person. Because establishing the tastes of an individual, group, or the average person is sometimes a difficult task, Schaffer’s account could make sense of cases of substantive descriptive disagreements. Furthermore, Schaffer offers a more objective value at work in substantive taste disagreements than pragmatic value—epistemic value. By appealing to epistemic value, Schaffer explains descriptive cases that involve epistemic peerhood. His account also allows for some cases of talking past. If two individuals have different descriptive aims (and no fact of the matter exists as to whose aim is relevant), then the disagreement may result in a standoff if neither person yields.

Schaffer’s solution to the Problem of Talking Past goes a long way toward addressing the problem in a manner that is consistent with a wide range of taste disagreements. However, on its own, it does not explain all of the disagreement data. To begin with, Schaffer’s explanation fails to cover all cases of faultless taste disagreements. This is because, once the participants have settled whose tastes are at issue, descriptive disagreements are determinate. There is always some fact of the matter as to the correct description of an individual taste perspective—even if it is difficult or in practice impossible to tell what it is. But, except for standoffs involving

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<sup>6</sup>Schaffer (2009) p. 209.

<sup>7</sup>Schaffer does not use “The Problem of Talking Past” to refer to the puzzle, but he does address it in his paper.

epistemic peerhood and some cases of cross-purpose disagreement, this account does not explain disagreements in which there is no fact of the matter as to who is right.

Furthermore, Schaffer's account doesn't directly explain many cases of substantive disagreement, including normative disagreements in which something other than or in addition to truth is at issue (and which are not merely pragmatically determined). These are disagreements about what the participant's tastes ought to be, not about what they are. And Schaffer's account leaves cases of disagreement in which evidence concerning the properties of the object (and not the experiences of an individual or group) are at issue. Granted, such evidence might be relevant in cases where the purpose is to determine the average person's tastes. Nonetheless, there are cases where it isn't. In such cases, the purpose of the debate seems to be about what is really tasty—and where it is clear that the average person can be mistaken about his or her views on the matter.

### **5.2.5 Rethinking the puzzle of disagreement: The Paradox of Taste**

I concluded Chapter 3 by arguing that our intuitions regarding fault or faultlessness in taste disagreements—including intuitions about whether retraction, entrenchment, eavesdropping, and the like were appropriate—varied depending on what we, as readers, understood to be the purpose of the disagreement. Little if any attention has been paid in the current literature to the purpose of taste disagreements. I believe that this is at least in part due to the fact that people have assumed that taste disagreements are merely expressive/descriptive endeavors, or that persuasive cases—if they are recognized at all—are merely pragmatically driven.

In Chapter 4, I suggested this assumption can be traced back to the common belief that the grounds (or rather groundlessness) of taste disagreement were merely subjective and hence precluded error. I suggested that in order to solve the Paradox of Taste, we would need to question these assumptions. The original puzzle of



“faultless disagreement” focused on semantically accounting for simple cases of taste disagreement such as (105).

(105) Luis: Is there anything good on tap?

Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all! Guinness, though—now that's tasty.

At first glance, it seemed natural to assume that these cases were purely subjective, meaning the truth of the claims were based in nothing more than individual preference. This assumption, combined with the fact that these were relatively simple cases situated outside of a larger context, led some philosophers and linguists to conclude that all taste disagreements are faultless in some sense.<sup>8</sup> However, as Jonathan Schaffer points out, if we consider only a small sample of contextually impoverished examples we will gather a skewed sense of the disagreement data. I argued that when we follow Schaffer's advice and examine more sophisticated examples which are located in richer contexts, we find the real puzzle of taste disagreements is more complicated than it first appears.

On the one hand, we will find that some examples of taste disagreements seem very different from cases of substantive empirical disagreement. We can call these sorts of cases “simple taste disagreements.” In simple cases, the participants often fail to offer much evidence for their positions or appeal to experts to resolve their disputes. Even in cases where the participants do defend their positions, it quickly becomes apparent that this project is pointless. As a result, retraction is entirely inappropriate. Sometimes the participants even entrench—retreating to descriptions of their own tastes—rather than continuing the discussion. Many of these disputes are irresolvable both in principle and in practice, and because of this they appear to be genuinely faultless.

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<sup>8</sup>For instance, see Lasersohn 2005, MacFarlane 2007, and Stephenson 2007.

On the other hand, not all taste disagreements are so simple. Some cases of disagreement appear to be resolvable both in principle and in practice. We can call these sort of cases “substantive taste disagreements” to contrast them with simple cases. In substantive taste disputes, the conversational participants often do offer evidence for their positions—evidence that seems designed to persuade their interlocutors. They appeal to experts and to intersubjective agreement to resolve disputes. In these cases, retraction is appropriate, because it appears that there is some sense in which at least one of the participants is at fault.

Many philosophers have primarily, if not exclusively, concerned themselves with explaining intuitions surrounding simple cases of taste disagreements.<sup>9</sup> Others focus on explaining the intuitions involving substantive taste disagreement while minimizing, if not explaining away, the faultless aspect.<sup>10</sup>

In Chapter 4, I claimed that since our intuitions about whether a disagreement was faultless or not depended on information or assumptions about the conversational aim of the disagreement, we needed to think seriously about the purpose of taste disagreements. I claimed that there are a variety of reasons to engage in taste disagreements. Having offered an account of the grounds of taste disagreements, I am now in a position to elaborate on their purpose and to show what role gustatory value plays in motivating gustatory disagreement.

### **5.3 The Purpose(s) of Taste Disagreements and The Paradox of Taste**

Previously, I distinguished two broad categories of conversational aims for taste disagreements: descriptive and persuasive. I suggested that both types of disagree-

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<sup>9</sup>Again, see see Lasersohn (2005), MacFarlane (2007), and Stephenson (2007).

<sup>10</sup>For instance, see Moltmann (2010) and Schaffer (2011).

ment involved coordination, and that coordination could be driven by different kinds of values. I argued that taste disagreements are like empirical disagreements in that they can be driven by epistemic, pragmatic, or perhaps even moral value. However, what distinguishes taste disagreements from disagreements about empirical matters of fact is that coordination in taste disagreements can be driven by gustatory value as well. I argue that gustatory value is the key to solving the paradox of taste because it allows for both fault and faultlessness. Before I present this solution, I will briefly review my general theory of taste coordination and gustatory value.

### **5.3.1 Coordination**

In Chapter 4, I argued that when individuals attempt to coordinate in a taste disagreement, they are trying to coordinate what I called “taste perspectives.” A taste perspective is a complex of dispositions to respond or react to the sensations produced by gustatory items, or to the gustatory items themselves. Among the responses and reactions involved in a taste perspective are things such as taste preferences: likes and dislikes with regard to taste. They may also include taste evaluations: beliefs or attitudes about which gustatory items or experiences are better or worse than others.

Because taste perspectives are complex, there are a variety of ways in which an individual can shape her taste perspective. For instance, a person can alter her sensibilities by increasing or decreasing awareness of or sensitivity to the physical properties of an item. An individual could change her preferences or evaluations. She could also alter her beliefs about her own taste perspective or the taste perspective of others. The fact that there are a variety of items to be coordinated in taste disagreements is one way in which taste coordination differs from epistemic coordination, which only involves belief coordination. Whether beliefs or tastes are coordinated depends on the type of disagreement. In descriptive taste disagreements, the participants primarily coordinate descriptive beliefs, while in normative taste disagreements

the participants coordinate sensitivities, preferences, and evaluations in addition to coordinating descriptive beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

### 5.3.1.1 Motivating Coordination

In Chapter 3, I suggested that coordination can be driven by a variety of values—for instance, epistemic value, moral value, pragmatic value, or some combination of these.<sup>12</sup> As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, Jonathan Schaffer and Tamia Stephenson seem to rely on epistemic value to explain taste coordination.<sup>13</sup> I agreed with Schaffer and Stephenson that epistemic value is a major reason for coordination. I argued that epistemic value is especially relevant in descriptive disagreements wherein the primary goal is to have more true beliefs about the tastes of the conversational participants. Epistemic value can also be at issue in normative taste disagreements. For instance, if someone is motivated to change her tastes so as to experience more gustatory pleasure, she ought to have true beliefs about what her tastes actually are in order to know what areas require modification. Furthermore, she should have true beliefs about

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<sup>11</sup>In persuasive disagreements, the goal is to change someone's taste rather than to change her beliefs. Of course, in order to change a person's tastes, it might be necessary to first change her beliefs about what is tasty. In the way I'm dividing things, however, the main goal in a persuasive disagreement is to change an individual's taste. Descriptive disagreements can also involve persuasion, but in these cases the main goal is to change a person's beliefs. Furthermore, in descriptive disagreements the relevant beliefs are beliefs about what an individual's tastes are, not about what her tastes ought to be. On the other side, persuasive arguments may also have a descriptive component because it may be necessary to establish the facts about what a person's tastes are before attempting to change her tastes.

<sup>12</sup>To my knowledge, no one has yet suggested moral value as a motivation for taste coordination. I think moral value could play a role in taste coordination. Perhaps even enjoying certain tastes is morally wrong—craving human flesh, for instance. There might be other pragmatic reasons for taste coordination that relate to moral value. For example, if vegetarianism is morally right, then it may be easier for an individual to refrain from eating meat if he or she loses a taste for bacon and develops a taste for soy. However, it seems that even if moral value does play a role in taste coordination, it will be a perennial one. For this reason, I will focus mainly on pragmatic, epistemic, and gustatory value.

<sup>13</sup>See Schaffer (2009) and Stephenson (2007).

what is really tasty. This could include knowing information about the gustatory experts and their tastes.

But, epistemic value does not explain persuasive disagreements where the goal is to change someone's taste rather than her beliefs. Neither does it account for normative disagreements where at least one of the participants thinks that the interlocutor ought to change his or her tastes. We saw that John MacFarlane points to pragmatic value as the sole motivation for taste coordination.<sup>14</sup> I agreed with MacFarlane that pragmatic value can also be a major motivation for taste coordination in certain normative disagreements. For instance, it may be socially beneficial to develop tastes that reflect inclusion in a class, culture, or tradition. However, I argued that appealing to epistemic value and pragmatic value cannot explain the full range of taste disagreements. This is because there are many taste disagreements in which there is a right way to coordinate, but where rightness is not ultimately determined by either pragmatic or epistemic value. Furthermore, appealing to epistemic and pragmatic value cannot explain cases of faultless disagreement where the fault does not seem to be either epistemic or pragmatic in nature.<sup>15</sup> I suggested that positing a distinctively gustatory value would allow us to explain both why coordination is worthwhile in the former sorts of cases, and why it is pointless or impossible in the latter cases.<sup>16</sup>

### 5.3.1.2 Gustatory value and coordination

In the previous chapter, I argued that gustatory value is grounded in gustatory pleasure. One method for pursuing gustatory pleasure is for an individual to coordi-

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<sup>14</sup>See MacFarlane, (2007).

<sup>15</sup>See Chapter 2 for examples of taste coordination that cannot be explained by appealing to pragmatic value and Chapter 3 for examples that cannot be fully explained by appealing to epistemic value.

<sup>16</sup>I've left it open whether gustatory value overlaps with other sorts of value. The answer to this question depends on what, if anything, grounds epistemic, moral, or pragmatic value. For instance, if hedonism about value is true, then perhaps all value has a common ground—pleasure.

nate her taste perspective with the taste perspective of someone with more gustatory expertise. I provided several examples designed to show that, in many cases, there is a fact of the matter as to who has more gustatory expertise and, hence, a fact of the matter as to the best way to coordinate taste perspectives. I looked to Peter Railton's theory of aesthetic value as a template for an objective theory of gustatory value. From Railton I borrowed, among other things, the notion of a match, which is the relationship of fit between a gustatory item and human sentiment. An item is a gustatory match when it gives us gustatory pleasure. Some matches are better than others because some pleasures are better than others. I argued that the goodness of pleasure should be calculated in terms of intensity and duration. The items that make for the best matches are those that are reliable sources of pleasure—items that provide pleasure that does not decrease and may even increase as time goes by and as we gain more experience of gustatory items. It is possible for an individual to be mistaken about what items make for good matches. Gustatory experts are individuals who, because of their gustatory training, are less likely to err with respect to their judgments about matches.

I distinguished between general matches, which are a matter of fit between a gustatory item and general human sentiment, and local matches, which are a matter of fit between gustatory items and individuals with specific sensitivities or specific gustatory backgrounds. I argued that local matches provide the main motivation for taste coordination, though general matches can still play a role. I claimed that local matches provide the grounds for a local standard of taste. In disagreements in which local matches are at issue, it is this standard that determines who is mistaken. I also argued for the existence of local experts in addition to general experts. While general experts are skilled in detecting matches for their species, local experts are individuals who are skilled in detecting matches for people with similar natural sensitivities and a similar gustatory background. Although a local gustatory expert need not be literally

similar to her fellow interlocutor, she must be able to successfully project herself into the position of someone with particular sensitivities and a particular gustatory background.

## **5.4 Solving the Puzzle of Taste Disagreements**

An account of the various values that drive coordination, including gustatory value, is the key to solving the Paradox of Taste. In section 5.5 I will show how my account of the purpose of taste disagreements can explain both the fault and faultlessness involved in taste disagreements. This includes explaining the role of experts, evidence, retraction, and entrenchment. It also involves explaining the existence of irresolvability. However, before resolving the paradox, I want to make sure we are clear on the notions we are trying to explain, in particular the notion of fault and faultlessness.

### **5.4.1 Clarifying Fault and Faultlessness**

Until this point, I have followed the current literature in using the expression “faultless disagreements.” I noted in Chapter 1 that this notion was problematic because there were a variety of things that could constitute fault in a disagreement, and it was unclear which played a role in our intuitions about taste disagreements. In the following section I will discuss what we could mean when we say a disagreement is faultless. Next I will argue that the notion of irresolvability is at the heart of the intuitions regarding faultless disagreement for taste.

#### **5.4.1.1 Two kinds of Fault**

In Chapter 4 I hinted that fault can be separated into two distinct notions: error and blame. Our intuitions of faultlessness may include either or both of these notions, so it is important to distinguish them. Now that I have given an account of the grounds of taste disagreements, I am in a better position to say more about each.

Although it may be somewhat controversial to do so, I would like to distinguish between making an error and being responsible for making that error. First, I will enumerate several errors that could be involved in a taste disagreement, and then I will discuss how someone could be blameworthy for making such errors.

As I suggested in Chapter 1, there could be several kinds of error involved in taste disagreement. Relativists like MacFarlane sometimes employ the notion of *factual error*. A person makes a factual error by saying something false. The question of when, if ever, an individual in a taste disagreement says something true or false belongs to the semantics of taste—an issue I will return to momentarily. I will leave it open whether both individuals in a taste disagreement can be faultless in the sense that neither one of them has said something false.

When we think about someone being in error in a disagreement, we often have in mind what I will call an *epistemic error*. A person makes an epistemic error when he or she makes an unwarranted judgment. Epistemic errors often lead to factual errors, but not always. As I will demonstrate below, there are several ways in which an individual can have mistaken judgments relating to taste. To name a few of these ways, an individual can be mistaken about what her true preferences are (though this is rare), she can be mistaken about whether an item is a good match for her, and she can be mistaken with regard to her own gustatory expertise or the expertise of others.

I have also made reference to another kind of mistake that is relevant to taste disagreements: a *gustatory error*. For instance, with regard to gustatory value, an individual in a taste disagreement can make a mistake when she fails to change her tastes in light of expert testimony, thereby potentially missing out on something gustatorily valuable—gustatory pleasure. Having mistaken beliefs is also a kind of value error, since the individual misses out on something epistemically valuable—the truth. Furthermore, an individual in a taste disagreement could miss out on



something pragmatically valuable or morally valuable. For instance, if Catholicism is true, then perhaps there is something morally wrong with enjoying meat during Lent. Or, with regard to practical value, there might be social costs to failing to change your tastes or your descriptive or normative beliefs concerning tastes—for instance, exclusion from membership in a group.

The notion of blameworthiness in a taste disagreement relates to the way we form our beliefs and develop our tastes.<sup>17</sup> In particular, blameworthiness is connected to the violation of norms and to unwarranted action. Several normative violations are relevant to disagreement. First, an individual could violate an *assertoric norm* by saying something *assertorically unwarranted*. For instance, if we assume that truth is the aim of assertion, an individual could violate an assertoric norm by asserting something false. If an individual violates an assertoric norm, she is assertorically blameworthy. I have assumed that an individual is assertorically prima facie warranted in a taste claim if she asserts it on the basis of what is pleasurable to her at the time of utterance. If I am right in this assumption, then this represents one way in which both individuals in a taste disagreement can be faultless—they can both be assertorically blameless. In order to determine whether my assumption is correct, however, we will have to settle questions about the semantics of taste and the corresponding assertoric norms for taste claims.

Second, an individual could violate an epistemic norm by doing something *epistemically unwarranted*, for instance, by forming her belief on the basis of inadequate evidence or by disregarding evidence such as expert testimony. Any individual who violates an epistemic norm is epistemically blameworthy. Although an individual may not be required to change her tastes when faced with the testimony of an established gustatory expert, she may be epistemically blameworthy for failing to change her

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<sup>17</sup>Blameworthiness may also be connected to the notion of motivation, but I will leave that aside for now.

beliefs about what makes for a good match. However, in cases in which there is no determinate expert, or in cases in which the participants cannot determine who the expert is, it may be possible for both individuals to blamelessly maintain their beliefs about what is tasty.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, standoff cases provide a major source for our intuitions about the faultlessness of taste disagreements.

With regard to gathering evidence, I have not said enough about what counts as “adequate evidence” in a taste disagreement to say when individuals in a taste disagreement are epistemically blameworthy. However, unless we set the standards for adequacy extremely low, such that an individual with no gustatory training could count as having adequate evidence, it will be possible for an individual in a taste disagreement to be epistemically at fault. On the other hand, provided we do not set the standards for adequacy too high—for instance, by requiring that an individual have an idealized level of gustatory training—it will be possible (barring any other epistemically unwarranted behavior on the part of the participants) for the participants in a taste disagreement to be epistemically faultless.

An individual can also be pragmatically blameworthy. For example, it could be that drinking cheap boxed wine at a black-tie event is a social *faux pas*—providing that one is aware of the relevant social norms. It may even be possible for someone to be morally blameworthy in a taste disagreement: if eating meat is morally wrong, then perhaps a convinced vegetarian who savors the taste of bacon is morally reprehensible.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Again, this is presuming it is acceptable to stand one’s ground in cases of gustatory standoffs caused by the presence of gustatory peers.

<sup>19</sup>Obviously I am drastically oversimplifying both the notion of blameworthiness and the discussion of what constitutes epistemic, pragmatic, or moral blameworthiness. These issues deserves much more attention than I can give them here. My only goal here is to separate notions of fault from blame, and to suggest several ways in which individuals could be either at fault or blameworthy for being at fault.

Finally, in the case of taste, an individual could violate a gustatory norm if it turns out that such norms exist. In order to know what it takes for an individual to fall short of her gustatory obligations, we would have to clarify the nature of gustatory norms. I have suggested that gustatory norms, if they exist, are conditional norms. An individual will be *gustatorily blameworthy* if she refuses to change her tastes in a way that would give her more or better pleasure, provided that she can change her tastes and is interested in the kind of pleasure that would result from changing her tastes. In some cases an individual can be blameless for making a gustatory error: if an individual cannot change her tastes because of limited access to culinary resources, she can't be blamed for missing out on something that would cause her pleasure.

#### **5.4.1.2 Faultlessness and resolvability**

The next issue that has to be cleared up is what sort of faultlessness is at issue in the debate about taste predicates. When I began this project, I used the term “faultless disagreement” in order to reflect the terminology of the current literature. Later, I suggested that while some taste disagreements were faultless, others were not. However, this way of dividing taste disagreements is misleading. As I suggested in Chapter 1, there are several kinds of fault that can be at issue in taste disagreements. An individual could be at fault in one sense while being faultless in another: someone in a taste disagreement might be epistemically at fault in a taste disagreement, but pragmatically blameless. In that case, it is a mistake to think of taste disagreements as being either faultless or not.

I do, however, want to mark out taste disagreements that are faultless in a special sense. In Chapters 2 and 3, I called this special kind of faultlessness “genuine faultlessness.” Although any kind of fault can drive intuitions of faultlessness in a taste disagreement, genuine faultlessness is at the heart of the intuition that taste disagreements are different than most disagreements about empirical matters of fact.

My aim in introducing the term “genuine faultlessness” was to point to a kind of falseness that was neither epistemic, nor pragmatic, nor moral; and to urge an investigation of this notion. But, until I completed this investigation in Chapter 4, I was not in a position to compare and contrast genuine faultlessness with epistemic, pragmatic or moral faultlessness. However, using the term ‘genuine’ can make it seem that epistemic faultlessness, for instance, is illegitimate in some sense. My intention was not to track legitimacy; rather, my use of ‘genuine faultlessness’ was meant to denote disagreements in which there is no fact of the matter as to who is right. I used the term ‘genuine’ because it seems to me that disagreements that are indeterminate in this sense are faultless in some “deeper” or “more fundamental” sense, and I hoped to connote this intuition to the reader. Of course, the terms ‘depth’ and ‘fundamentally’ are also philosophically laden. My account does not rest on genuine faultlessness being deeper than other kinds of faultlessness, and so the reader is free to use another term to pick out disagreements in which there is no fact of the matter.<sup>20</sup>

However, when I first laid out the puzzle of faultless disagreement, I focused on whether disagreements appeared to be resolvable rather than whether there was a fact of the matter as to who was right. I focused on resolvability because many of our intuitions about faultlessness in taste disagreements are really just intuitions about resolvability. Furthermore, appealing to resolvability can help us distinguish between faultlessness and genuine faultlessness. I suggest that faultless disagreements are disagreements that are irresolvable. However there is more than one way in which a taste disagreement can be irresolvable: it can be irresolvable in principle or in practice.

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<sup>20</sup>Whether epistemic, pragmatic, and moral value allows for genuine faultlessness in my sense depends on whether each of these areas allow for any degree of metaphysical indeterminacy. If that is the case, then it will be inappropriate to contrast genuine faultlessness with epistemic, pragmatic, and moral faultlessness. I do not have the space to explore the grounds of each of these areas here. However, after giving a theory of the grounds of gustatory norms, I am in a position to explain genuine faultlessness with regard to gustatory value.

In disagreements that are in principle irresolvable, there is no fact of the matter as to who is right. Disagreements that are in-principle irresolvable correspond to what I've called "genuinely faultless disagreements." A disagreement may be resolvable in principle (there is some fact of the matter as to who is right) though, but irresolvable in practice because of stubbornness, ignorance, epistemic peerhood, and the like. Disagreements that are in practice irresolvable also sometimes strike us as faultless, but for different reasons than when disagreements that are in principle irresolvable appear faultless. For instance, in descriptive disagreements, there will always be some fact of the matter as to what the relevant individual or group's tastes are. However, if the individuals are epistemic peers, it might not be possible in practice to ever resolve it. In that case, we may have the intuition that the disagreement is epistemically faultless.<sup>21</sup> Contrast this sort of faultlessness with the faultlessness involved in certain normative cases of taste disagreements, such as a case in which two people have radically and unalterably different tastes. These cases also appear to be faultless, but the fault is not epistemic. Such cases are irresolvable in principle in addition to being irresolvable in practice.

Rather than dividing disagreements into faulty and faultless disagreements (and from there into disagreements that are faultless and genuinely faultless), we ought to focus on explaining resolvability and irresolvability in taste disagreements. By doing so, we will be able to explain both substantive and simple cases of taste disagreement. In sections (5.6) and (5.7) below, I will apply what I have said regarding the purpose(s) of taste disagreement to solve the Paradox of Taste.

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<sup>21</sup>If you think epistemic peerhood involves in-principle resolvability, then you might balk at the way I'm dividing it here.

## 5.5 Disagreement Explained

One reason that even more sophisticated accounts of predicates of personal taste have not been able to fully explain cases of taste disagreements is because they have implicitly assumed certain things about the nature of such disagreements. For instance, MacFarlane assumes taste disagreements are too little like disagreements about empirical matters of fact (because they are just about coordinating purely subjective matters). MacFarlane doesn't leave room for "genuine fault," or rather, disagreements which are in principle objectively resolvable. Schaffer assumes they are completely like disagreements about empirical matters of fact (because they are just descriptions of taste perspectives). So, he doesn't leave room for "genuine faultlessness," or, as we now understand it, disagreements that are in-principle irresolvable. As we have seen, however, the truth is that taste disagreements resemble empirical disagreements in some ways and are very different in others. Taste disagreements are objectively in principle resolvable in some cases and in principle irresolvable in others. Below I will show how appealing to gustatory value allows us to explain how this can be so.

## 5.6 Resolvable Taste Disagreement Explained

Many substantive taste disagreements—disagreements in which the participants appeal to evidence and cite expertise—are in principle resolvable. Furthermore, many substantive taste disagreements are resolvable in practice as well. It is because of this that retraction in taste disagreements is sometimes appropriate.<sup>22</sup> Both descriptive and normative taste disagreements can be substantive. The kind of value at issue in the disagreement determines what sort of evidence is offered, who are the experts, and whether retraction is appropriate. Since gustatory value is the least familiar kind

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<sup>22</sup>I say 'many' because, as I will explain in the next section, determining whether a disagreement is resolvable can itself be a substantive debate.

of value, I will mostly focus on showing how this sort of value can explain evidence, expertise, and retraction in the following section. And along the way, I will mention the role other kinds of value—epistemic value, for instance—can play in explaining these phenomena in taste disagreements.

### 5.6.1 Evidence, expertise, and retraction

#### 5.6.1.1 Evidence, expertise, and retraction in descriptive disagreements

Exactly who is the expert and what counts as evidence in a taste disagreement depends on the purpose of the disagreement. For instance, in a descriptive disagreement in which the goal is to discover what the speaker's tastes are at the time of the disagreement, the speaker is usually the expert. This is because it is unusual—though as Schaffer has pointed out, not impossible—for an individual to be mistaken about what his or her tastes are at a given time.<sup>23</sup> In a descriptive disagreement where the group tastes, or the taste of the average person, are at issue, we don't automatically assume that the speaker is the expert. In such cases, unless it is clear to the conversational participants who is in the best position to determine the descriptive facts, the participants might offer evidence to determine who the expert is. Consider (106).

(106) Bar owner: I'm trying to figure out what sort of beer the average person likes so I know what to buy for the bar. What would you recommend?

Jim: Belgium Sours are tasty!

Ed: No way!

Jim: But, Ed, you love Belgium Sours—doesn't everyone?

Ed: I know I do, but the average person doesn't. I've been in the restaurant business a long time, and believe me, those sours never sell.

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<sup>23</sup>See Schaffer (2009).

In other disagreements, descriptions may be relevant to a persuasive goal as in (107).

(107) Anne: What sort of pizza should we get for the party?

Matt: Anchovies are tasty!

Anne: No they aren't.

Matt: Well, I like them!

Anne: I know you do, but most people don't share your tastes. Remember when you served escargot at the last party? Everyone hated it!

The main goal of this descriptive disagreement is pragmatic—it's to figure out what Matt and Anne should order. But, in order to do this, Matt and Anne have to determine what the average person enjoys. In this case, Anne has given Matt reason to think he is not the best judge of the average person's tastes.

#### **5.6.1.2 Evidence, expertise, and retraction in normative disagreements**

In a normative disagreement, in which the goal is to change a person's tastes, the kind of value at issue determines what counts as evidence and who counts as the expert. For instance, in an argument in which pragmatic value is at issue, evidence and expertise will be pragmatically determined. In normative disagreements where gustatory value is at issue, evidence and expertise are determined by what is really tasty. I have argued that tastiness is a response-dependent property that is grounded in matches between human sentiment and tasty-making properties. In that case, two kinds of evidence are relevant: information about gustatory objects—in particular their tasty-making characteristics—and information about taste perspectives.

The fact that evidence involving tasty-making characteristics is relevant explains why individuals often cite properties of the object as evidence in taste disagreement. Such information may change an individual's beliefs about what is really tasty (or



about what they ought to find tasty). Furthermore, it may be that noticing certain properties of the object changes the way an object tastes to someone (or perhaps merely changes an individual's awareness of her sensations). In that case, hearing evidence about tasty-making characteristics may also change a person's evaluations or preferences.

However, in taste disagreements individuals often cite information about subjective states instead of, or in addition to, citing information about gustatory objects. My account of gustatory value, also explains the relevance of this sort of evidence to a normative disagreement. Because tastiness depends on human sentiment as much as on properties of the object, information about an individual's taste perspective can also be relevant in taste disagreements. I will assume that, except in cases of projection or known expertise, when an individual in a taste disagreement makes a claim involving taste, she often bases her claims (at least initially) on her taste perspective at the time of utterance. If that is the case, then even if taste claims are normative, they can also convey descriptive information. When we make an utterance involving taste, we are making available to our fellow interlocutor information about what things are like from our own taste perspectives.

This can include information about what things the individual considers to be local matches. If the individual is a general gustatory expert, then knowing what things are pleasurable for her may give us information about what things are typically sources of pleasure for human beings in general. If the individual is a general gustatory expert, then we can learn which things might be sources of pleasure for individuals or for human beings in general (in some cases pending further gustatory training). Let's return to (108).

(108) Undergraduate: Boone's Farm is tasty!

Wine Connoisseur: You're wrong; Boone's Farm isn't tasty. You need to branch out a bit, and you'll see what I mean.

Even though the student and the connoisseur both have good reason for their utterances at the time they make them, one of them might still have a motivating reason to change his or her taste perspectives. Imagine that the student thinks the connoisseur is a better local gustatory expert than he is: this means that the student believes that he and the connoisseur are similar, but that the connoisseur has a better gustatory education. Hence, he knows the connoisseur is in touch with a more intense, longer lasting, more reliable, or simply different source of pleasure. The evidence offered by the connoisseur might be designed to convince the student that there are better sources of gustatory pleasure than Boone's Farm. For instance, the connoisseur might think that there are more reliable sources of pleasure than Boone's Farm, or sources that yield a more intense or longer lasting pleasure. It could also be that the connoisseur wants to get the student in touch with a different kind of pleasure than the pleasure provided by Boone's Farm—a more intellectual pleasure. At the same time, the connoisseur's remark can serve as a way of instructing the student. If the student is interested in the kind of pleasure available to the connoisseur, he has a reason to develop his palate in the way the connoisseur suggests. If the student does manage to develop his palate, this will alter his taste perspective. When this happens, it is appropriate (though not obligatory) for the student to issue a retraction like that in (109).

(109) Undergraduate: Boone's Farm is tasty!

Wine connoisseur: You're wrong; Boone's Farm isn't tasty. You need to branch out a bit, and you'll see what I mean.

Undergraduate [post-perspectival coordination]: You're right; Boone's farm isn't tasty. [OR]

Undergraduate [post-perspectival coordination]: I was wrong; Boone's Farm isn't tasty.

In (109) we assume that the student recognizes the connoisseur to be the expert because it is common knowledge that wine connoisseurs have a good deal of gustatory training. But, in many normative cases, it will not be clear to the conversational participants who the expert is. One reason to offer evidence in a disagreement about taste is to convince your interlocutor that you are a better local or general expert than she is.

You can do a variety of things to try to establish that you have more gustatory expertise than your interlocutor. Provided your interlocutor has typical sensibilities, it might help to cite the fact that your tastes are shared by the majority of people, or by the majority of experts, as in (110).

(110) Josh: The food at Mimmo's is tasty.

Tara: No way! I have talked to a lot of people, and no one thinks the food there is tasty.

Of course, this isn't to say that such evidence is decisive. As with empirical disagreements, even the majority of people can be wrong. Another way of trying to establish expertise is to cite your sensitivity or gustatory training. You could also try to demonstrate your sensitivity or training by pointing out properties of the object that your interlocutor might be unaware of, for instance. In a dialog like (111), part of what Jim seems to be doing is pointing out that his gustatory training allows him to be more sensitive to the properties of Budweiser.

(111) Ed: Budweiser is tasty.

Jim: No, Budweiser isn't tasty at all! It's so watered down, it hardly tastes like beer. Guinness, on the other hand, has a far richer flavor. If you started drinking more stouts, you would see what I mean.

Ed: Budweiser is tasty! Budweiser is crisp and refreshing, just like an American lager is supposed to be. You're just expecting the wrong things from it by comparing it to other styles of beer.

## 5.7 Irresolvable Taste Disagreement Explained

I have tried to demonstrate several ways in which disagreements about taste can have a purpose, even if matters of taste are subjective. However, not all disagreements about taste do have a purpose. What makes some disagreements about taste worthwhile while others are pointless? The answer to this question takes us back to questions about the resolvability of disagreement. If there are gustatory experts, and we have a reason to defer to these experts, then why are some disagreements irresolvable either in principle or in practice?

### 5.7.1 Ignorance and gustatory peers

There are many reasons why a *gustatory standoff*, as I will call it, could occur. First of all, the situation might involve an epistemic standoff because there will be cases in which it is difficult or impossible for the conversational participants to know who the expert is. For instance, there may be cases in which the conversational participants do not know beforehand who has more expertise and in which neither person has offered much evidence for his or her expertise. In this sort of situation, the standoff is often temporary. It will occur only until the two parties have more information about who is in a better gustatory position. Epistemic standoffs can also occur in descriptive disagreements in which two epistemic peers discuss what an individual's or group's tastes are.

In other cases, a standoff may occur because the conversational participants are *gustatory peers* in the sense that they are built similarly, have similar backgrounds, and have similar levels of gustatory training. Standoffs between gustatory peers are

in practice irresolvable. Except in certain cases, which I will discuss momentarily, there is some fact of the matter as to what would count as a better source of pleasure and who is more in touch with that source. However, because the expert may never be known, some of these cases may be irresolvable in practice.<sup>24</sup>

### 5.7.2 No determinate expert

Second, there are cases in which there is no determinate answer as to who is the local expert. For example, there are cases in which local matches are at issue, but the conversational participants are built very differently or have very different gustatory backgrounds, even if they have similar levels of gustatory training. If the participants are different enough from one another, neither of them can act as a local expert for the other. Failing projection, they will remain in a standoff indefinitely.

A similar situation arises if we allow that there could be cases such as (112) in which two individuals have similar gustatory sensations with respect to an item but differ with regard to how much pleasure they get out of those sensations.

(112) Scotch Connoisseur 1: Macallan 21 is tasty. It's so round and smooth!

Scotch Connoisseur 2: That's false; Macallan 21 is not tasty. It may be round and smooth, but it lacks interest and character!

If the two experts are debating over general matches, then perhaps there will be a determinate expert, though they may not know who it is. However, if they are debating over local matches, then (failing projection) there will be no determinate expert. Unless the tasters have an identical physical makeup and background, it seems possible that individual differences could exist even after extensive gustatory

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<sup>24</sup>What is the most reasonable and responsible course of action when you find yourself in a disagreement with a gustatory peer? Is there some presumption in your favor? Should you “suspend belief”—that is to say, should you hold off changing your tastes? I hope to explore these questions in further work.

training. In that case, these debates will be irresolvable both in principle and in practice.

### 5.7.3 Non-starters

Finally, certain dialogs about taste may appear to be irresolvable simply because they do not qualify as disagreements at all (and hence are not the sorts of things that are candidates for resolvability). “Disagreements” such as these, if we even want to call them that, are *non-starters*. They are not irresolvable so much as they are cases in which the individuals involved are *talking past one another*. While we don’t want to say, as baseline contextualism does, that all disagreements about taste are just cases of talking past, we certainly have to recognize the fact that there are some such cases.

#### 5.7.3.1 Cross-purpose-based non-starters

To begin with, individuals can talk past one another if they assume different conversational topics or purposes. One individual might assume the participants are involved in a descriptive disagreement, while the other might assume they are engaged in a normative disagreement. In such cases, it makes sense for an individual to retreat to a description of her own taste perspective. Entrenchment is one way of signaling that the individual is assuming a descriptive aim. This is because an individual can make it clear that his or her intent was to describe his or her own taste perspective.

As Schaffer’s (2009) article makes clear, even if both individuals assume a descriptive aim, there might be an issue about whose tastes are being described—the speaker, the group, a contextually salient individual, and so on. Talking past can also occur in cases where both participants have normative aims but differ as to which norms they take to be relevant. For instance, one participant may have gustatory norms in mind, while the other is considering merely pragmatic norms. Furthermore, the par-

ticipants in such cases of *cross-purpose disagreements* might be epistemically faultless if it turns out there is no right answer as to what is *the* conversational purpose.

In general, entrenchment can be a way of making sure individuals are not at cross-purposes. Indeed, we might extend the term ‘entrenchment’ to cover a variety of similar clarifications. For instance, a person could make it clear that they intended to describe the tastes of a contextually salient individual, a salient group, or the average person. Imagine that in (113), Ed and Jim are sitting in a middle class bar in Georgia.

(113) Ed: Bud Light is tasty.

Jim: No way, it’s disgusting.

Ed: Listen, I’m not saying you would like it, I’m just saying that your average southerner does.

Someone could even use entrenchment to mark that they are interested in a descriptive debate rather than a normative one, as in (114).

(114) Ed: Bud Light is tasty.

Jim: Are you kidding? *The Beer Advocate* says it’s the worst beer on the market.

Ed: Listen, I’m not saying it’s a great beer, I’m just saying that a lot of people like it.

### 5.7.3.2 Match-based non-starters

Finally, the relativity of matches itself accounts for a great deal of irresolvable disagreement. If matches are relative to things such as species, genre, and context, then it will be pointless, if not impossible, to coordinate taste perspectives in these cases. For instance, if part of the point of perspectival disagreements is to make your fellow interlocutor aware of general or local matches (and to allow him or her

to experience a better source of pleasure), and matches are relative to genre, then it would be inappropriate to compare items from different genres, as in (115).<sup>25</sup>

(115) Josh: Candy is tastier than wine!

Tara: # No way! Wine is tastier than candy!

Supposing that candy and wine belong to different genres, it makes no sense to compare them to see which is a better local or general match. It would be similarly pointless, though for slightly different reasons, to argue with someone or something from another species, as in (116).<sup>26</sup>

(116) Burt the Bird: Worms are tasty!

Sam: # No way! Worms are not tasty!

If matches are relative to species, then not only is there no determinate local expert in (116), there is no determinate general expert. Of course, there might be some point to this argument initially. It is informative for us to have some evidence about what things are like from the perspective of someone of another species. This sort of information could help us to determine whether there is enough similarity to allow for a determinate local or general expert. However, it would be pointless to continue arguing after that information had been ascertained. Assuming Sam is built so differently from Burt that he could never learn to enjoy worms, then there is no reason for either one of them to try to change his mind.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Although it is often inappropriate to compare items from different genres, given the right context there might be cases in which it is appropriate.

<sup>26</sup>Again, it would be pointless unless one of the participants is reasonably able to project him or herself into the other's shoes.

<sup>27</sup>In his (2007a) article, Andy Egan gives examples of cross-species disagreement, though his explanation of these examples differs from mine.



Other examples of non-starters might include cases such as (117), in which one individual is interested in what makes for good general matches while the other is interested in what makes for good local matches.

(117) Anne: What is the ideal holiday meal?

Chip: Lutefisk is tasty!

Anne: I think most people would disagree with you. After all, it's a fish packed in lye.

Chip: Sorry, I was just thinking of holidays in my family—we are Norwegian, so for us Lutefisk is a treat.

It is possible that an individual is built very differently from the majority of their species so that there would be little point in disagreeing over matters of taste. In these cases, entrenchment is often appropriate.

(118) Bobby: cupcakes are not tasty.

Lisha: Are you crazy? Everyone loves cupcakes. Of course they are tasty!

Bobby: Sorry, I just meant they aren't tasty to me—I lost my sense of taste in an accident.

One question is whether Bobby is talking about local matches or is merely describing his own experience. The answer is that an individual can speak as a local expert even if the group of those similar to themselves is very small. In that case, Bobby can both be describing his own tastes and taking his taste to be representative of the experiences of those like him. However, it may be possible for there to be cases in which a person is so different from the rest of her species that she has nothing in common with them. Call these “purely subjective” cases, and call the individuals involved in them “lonely local experts.” On my account, lonely local experts are still technically local experts because they are experts in what is pleasurable to those who are like them. It is just that for these experts, no one is actually built like them.

Clearly, much more needs to be said about the way in which and the degree to which matches are relative to other factors. Furthermore, we ought to take care in following this path. Allowing for too much relativity can undermine our explanation of the purpose of taste disagreement. For instance, if genres are extremely specific, then it will turn out that almost every “disagreement” about taste would just be a matter of people talking past one another. For now, though, my purpose is to give an explanation of the purpose of taste disagreements that can account for both fault and faultlessness. Figuring out just how much there is of each in taste disagreements will be another useful and interesting project.

### **5.7.3.3 Offering evidence as a way to determine resolvability**

So far, I’ve explained substantive and simple cases of taste disagreements by dividing them into disagreements that are either resolvable or irresolvable. But, can taste disagreements which are irresolvable in principle ever be substantive? In other words, do the participants in irresolvable taste disagreements ever offer evidence, appeal to experts, and so on? The answer is yes. One major reason for offering evidence in a disagreement about taste is to establish whether the disagreement is in principle resolvable. Because there are so many reasons a taste disagreement can be irresolvable, determining resolvability can itself be a substantive task. For instance, the participants in a taste disagreement might offer evidence to help them determine whether there is a unique local expert. To do this, they must determine whether the conditions for local expertise have been met, and this process can be difficult. For instance, the participants must discover how similarly they are built to one another, and how similar are their gustatory backgrounds. Once these preliminaries have been established, the participants can work to establish who is in a better position to detect local matches. Likewise, there may be cases in which the participants are trying to determine whether other conditions for resolvability have been met, such as the

specificity of species, genre, or context. For instance, it seems that part of what Ed is doing in (111) is faulting Jim for making a cross-genre comparison.

Other examples in which individuals offer evidence to determine resolvability include cases in which it isn't clear whether both participants have the same conversational aims. One individual may have a descriptive aim while the other has a normative aim. Likewise, one person may have pragmatic norms in mind while the other is guided by gustatory norms. Similarly, one individual could be trying to establish the tastes of the group while the other is interested in the taste of a particular individual. In that case, even the irresolvable cases of disagreement can be substantive. Perhaps, then, the only cases that truly deserve the label "simple" are ones in which the sole purpose of the disagreement is for the participants to express their preferences, or to engage in some sort of social game. Certainly such cases exist, but I think it's better to say that such activities only resemble disagreements, since there is nothing that the participants are debating about.

## 5.8 The Semantics of Taste

How does my explanation of the purpose of taste disagreements fit into the debate about the semantics of predicates of personal taste? Ultimately, I think it shows that the disagreement data should not play a role in deciding the correct semantics of taste.

In Chapter 3, I argued that background information (either implicit or explicit) about the purpose of taste disagreements drives intuitions about fault and faultlessness in taste disagreements. Because of this, my strategy was to offer an explanation of the intuitive data by offering an account of the purpose of taste disagreements. As a result, my solution to the paradox of taste was pragmatic in nature rather than semantic. I believe that, in principle, my explanation of taste disagreements is compatible with each of the leading semantic approaches. In chapters 3 and 4 I detailed

what role conversational purpose played in Stephenson's, MacFarlane's, and Schaffer's accounts. However I will not attempt to give all of the details about how an account of the purpose of taste disagreements involving gustatory value is compatible with each account. The reason is that I think we do not need to go that far.

This is because it is possible that the disagreement data can be accommodated without adopting any form of contextualism or relativism for taste. That is, it is consistent with the disagreement data that 'tasty' is a non-indexical, one-place property without any covert variables representing a taster, and that sentences containing 'tasty' express propositions that are not relative to a judge.<sup>28</sup> In other words, it is possible that utterances of sentences containing predicates of personal taste express propositions that are minimal with regard to taste. The fact that a minimalist semantics for 'tasty' is consistent with the disagreement data is enough to show that the disagreement data should not play a role in determining the correct semantics of taste.

### 5.8.1 Minimalism about 'tasty'

It is at least consistent with the data that predicates of personal taste are one-place predicates that describe an objective property. By saying that the minimalist view is compatible with the data, I am not intending to argue for that position. I am merely presenting it as a plausible semantic alternative. I'm arguing that the disagreement data alone does not motivate the move to either relativism or contextualism. As I will argue in section 5.8.2, we may have other reasons to adopt a relativist or contextualist semantics for predicates of personal taste.

On my version of the minimalist view, tastiness could refer to a response-dependent property. If my view of gustatory value is correct, then tastiness is a relation of fit between features of the object and human faculties. In particular, it is a match

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<sup>28</sup>Though perhaps they are relative to other factors—worlds or times, for instance.

between tasty-making features and a taste perspective that results in gustatory pleasure. Because matches can be local or general, taste statements can describe the fit between a gustatory item and an individual, a group, or even the average person (or average member of a given species). The sense in which ‘tasty’ is minimal is that it is semantically minimal. The property of tastiness itself is not minimal. Instead, the predicate ‘tasty’ picks out different objective properties in different contexts.

Because taste claims refer to a response-dependent property, this allows claims containing ‘tasty’ to be both descriptive and normative. They are descriptive in the sense that they express something about the property of tastiness, which involves a description of the relationship between the gustatory object and the experiencing subject. However, taste claims can also be normative because tastiness is grounded in an objective value—gustatory pleasure. Many times, individuals will only be interested in the descriptive information. Nonetheless, ‘tasty’ still has normative force, whether the conversational participants make use of it or not.

To say that ‘tasty’ is monadic and non-relative with regard to arguments representing the taster is not to disallow that it could still have hidden arguments or relativities of other sorts. For instance, ‘tasty’ contains arguments which account for scale or have parameters that represent standards of precision.<sup>29</sup> In fact, it would hardly be surprising if ‘tasty’ turned out to be complex in these ways. After all, if gustatory pleasure comes in degrees, then so does tastiness. While it’s true that aged cheddar is tasty, it’s also true that Cheese Whiz is tasty (though perhaps to a lesser degree). In that case, it makes sense for some kind of scaling to be reflected in the semantics. Likewise, what counts as tasty might change depending on the strictness of the contextual standard. In the context of an international beer competition, per-

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<sup>29</sup>See Lewis, 1980 for more on standards of precision.

haps Budweiser is not tasty. However, in the context of a tailgate party, Budweiser is tasty indeed.

### 5.8.1.1 Irresolvability and minimalism

Of course, on my theory of gustatory value, there are situations in which tastiness is indeterminate. How should this point be reflected in the meta-semantics? We have a couple of options. First, we could adopt an error theory for taste claims.<sup>30</sup> There is something that the individual intends to describe as really tasty, but in her particular situation nothing fits that description. Normally, adopting an error theory is a last resort because it entails that speakers are systematically mistaken. Taking on an error theory is less repugnant in this instance, though, because there will only be certain instances in which speakers are automatically in error. Furthermore, these are just the cases in which it seems plausible to suggest that ‘no one is right’ and, in fact, everyone is wrong.

Is error theory in tension with my explanation of faultless in taste disagreement? I explained faultlessness in terms of indeterminacy. Won’t this mean that in faultless disagreements both individuals say something false? Yes. However, it isn’t as bad as it first sounds. As I have argued, there are several kinds of fault at issue in a taste disagreement. The type of error theory I am considering says that individuals involved in in-principle irresolvable disagreements are semantically in error. Although they may have aimed at truth, they both say something false. Such individuals could be gustatorily or epistemically faultless in the sense that they are epistemically or gustatorily blameless.

However, if we are uncomfortable saying that, in cases of indeterminacy, everyone is wrong (at least in one sense), we could adopt some sort of non-cognitivism instead.

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<sup>30</sup>Thanks to Phillip Bricker for suggesting the option of giving an error theoretic treatment of these cases.

We could say that cases which are in-principle irresolvable have an indeterminate truth value. In such cases an individual who makes an utterance containing ‘tasty’ utters something that is neither true nor false.

To say that certain cases of taste claims have an indeterminate truth value is not to say that they have no purpose. For instance, such utterances could serve as expressions of preferences. They could also function as imperatives. This latter option is attractive because, even in cases where it is clear that there is no fact of the matter as to what is really tasty, an individual can still have reason to want her interlocutor to share her tastes or her beliefs about tastiness. Coordination in such cases, though not driven by gustatory value, could be pragmatically oriented. As MacFarlane suggests, there may be great social value in sharing tastes.<sup>31</sup>

This option has the advantage of allowing for a semantic notion of faultlessness in indeterminate cases that could be interpreted as meaning that no one is right or wrong. Notice that this notion of semantic faultlessness doesn’t go as far as saying that both people are right, as relativism suggests. This result may be desirable if, as I argued in Chapter 1, being right seems to go beyond lack of error or blamelessness and connotes that the individual has done something right or even praiseworthy.

In the end, we may find that having to appeal to some sort of error theory or non-cognitivism to cover indeterminate cases is too high a price to pay for the semantic simplicity of a minimalist approach to ‘tasty.’ That’s fine. My main point is just that the sort of option is possible for ‘tasty’ and is in fact much more plausible than the current literature admits. The fact that a minimalist is compatible with the disagreement data shows that the disagreement data alone does not give us a reason to move to a more complicated semantic approach such as relativism or contextualism.

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<sup>31</sup>“We have an interest in sharing standards of taste, senses of humor, and epistemic states with those around us. The reasons are different in each case. In the case of humor, we want people to appreciate our jokes, and we want them to tell jokes we appreciate.” MacFarlane, 2007, p. 22.

However, this is not to say that I am advocating for a minimalist approach. As I will discuss in the following section, there are other sorts of reasons besides disagreement that could sway us towards either contextualism or relativism.

### 5.8.2 Alternative data

My reason for showing that the disagreement data is compatible with a minimalist approach is not to claim that we ought to endorse a minimalist approach to predicates of personal taste. Instead, I merely intend to show that since the disagreement data is compatible with a minimalist approach, this data alone does not move us toward either a relativist or a contextualist account. This is not to say that there are not other reasons for moving towards either relativism or contextualism.

On the contextualist side, for instance, Jonathan Schaffer argues convincingly that there are various syntactic tests that shed light on the semantics of predicates of personal taste. According to Schaffer, such diagnostics include tests to discover the existence of covert variables. For instance, he cites *binding tests*—tests that would confirm the existence of a covert variable representing a taster by producing a reading in which the variable appears to be bound by a quantifier such as (119).<sup>32</sup>

(119) Matt: How was the food at the wedding?

Anne: Everyone ate something tasty.

Anne's statement could mean that there was one particular thing that everyone ate and found tasty as in (120). However, it also has a reading in which Person A ate something tasty to Person A, Person B ate something tasty to person B, and so on, as in (121).

(120) Anne: Everyone ate something tasty. There was just one option for dinner,  
but it was a hit with all of the guests.

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<sup>32</sup>For more on binding tests, see Partee, 1989 and Stanley, 2000.



(121) Anne: Everyone ate something tasty. Luis had the pasta, Josh had the salmon, Tara had the chicken, and I had the soup.

Schaffer argues that possibility of the second, more natural reading, points to the existence of a syntactically real covert variable that is bound by “every.”<sup>33</sup> Whether or not you are convinced by Schaffer, the important thing to notice is that the sort of syntactic argument he appeals to does not appeal to disagreements in any way.

On the relativist side, Peter Lasnik offers arguments that do not appeal to taste disagreement.<sup>34</sup> For instance, Lasnik appeals to the behavior of predicates of personal taste in certain attitude contexts. One such case involves predicate of personal tastes embedded under *factive predicates* such as recognize, regret and realize. Sentences containing factive predicates presuppose the truth of the complement clause. For example, consider (122).

(122) Bobby: Franklin recognizes that his famous meatloaf is tasty.

Ordinarily, in order to felicitously assert a sentence containing a factive predicate, the speaker must be committed to the truth of the complement clause.<sup>35</sup> In some cases, the felicitous use of the sentence also requires that the subject is committed to the truth of the complement clause.

A natural interpretation of (122) is that both Bobby and Franklin assess “his cooking is tasty” as true. However, Lasnik argues that contextualist accounts in which predicates of personal taste contain hidden indexicals referring to tasters will not allow this reading of (122). Once it has been determined that the relevant taster is John, then Bobby’s utterance means “Franklin recognizes that his cooking

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<sup>33</sup>Binding tests are one of several tests Schaffer presents in support of contextualism. See Schaffer, 2009.

<sup>34</sup>Lasnik, 2009.

<sup>35</sup>As Lasnik point out, there are exceptions. For instance, the statement, “Mac doesn’t know that he is a good cook, and he regrets that the meal he served isn’t tasty” doesn’t commit the speaker to the truth of the compliment clause.

is tasty to Franklin.” This fails to capture the reading that implies that Franklin’s meatloaf is also tasty to Bobby, though. Again, whether or not you find Lasersohn’s argument convincing, it establishes that there are other ways of determining the correct semantics of taste. What is important is that his arguments do not appeal to the disagreement data.

I have claimed that, by appealing to my account of the purpose of taste disagreements, sophisticated forms of both relativism and contextualism can be shown to be compatible with the disagreement data. In that case, we are free to look to other tests, such as those offered by Schaffer and Lasersohn, to help decide what semantics to adopt for predicates of personal taste.<sup>36</sup>

## 5.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that, in order to resolve the Paradox of Taste, we must appeal to a theory about the grounds of taste disagreement. As of yet, no systematic account of gustatory value has been developed in the context of the semantic debate about taste. Accordingly, I presented such a theory based on a theory of aesthetic value by Peter Railton. I claimed that this theory offers a full explanation of why some taste disagreements are faultless while others are not. Because my theory is a meta-aesthetic rather than a semantic theory, it is neutral with regard to the semantics of taste. The theory can be paired with either relativism or contextualism to help solve the paradox of taste. It is also consistent with a semantics that is minimalist with regard to either covert variables/hidden indexicals or parameters that represent tasters. The latter point makes it especially clear that the data taste disagreements alone do not require us to move to complicate the semantics in the way relativism

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<sup>36</sup>For my own part, I find Schaffer’s arguments more convincing. Furthermore, because his theory has built in flexibility to accommodate differences in conversational purpose, his view is naturally paired to my account of the purpose of taste disagreements. But, I will not pursue that here.

or contextualism suggest. This does not, however, preclude the possibility that there are other sorts of arguments—syntactic arguments, for instance—that might establish the truth of either contextualism or relativism for taste predicates. In the end, I have argued that since my theory explains taste disagreements in a semantically neutral way, the data from taste disagreements cannot count in favor of a particular semantic theory. Considering the prominent role disagreement data has played in the debate about the semantics of taste, this result is both surprising and significant. With the removal of taste disagreements from our list of semantic desiderata, we are free to turn to more fruitful ways of establishing the correct semantics of predicates of personal taste.

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