Talking about Taste: Disagreement, Implicit Arguments and Relative Truth

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Abstract

In this paper, I take issue with the claim that the correct semantics for taste predicates *must* use contents that are functions of a "taste" parameter (in addition to the possible world parameter), and that this parameter *cannot* be seen as an implicit argument lexically associated with the expression. I will argue that the two "rival" approaches are, from the viewpoint of semantics, pretty much notational variants of one another: given any sentence containing a taste predicate, and given any context, the two accounts predict the same truth value, and are, in that sense, semantically equivalent. I will also look at possible reasons for preferring one account over the other. The phenomenon of "faultless disagreement" is often believed to be one such reason, but I will argue that there is no such thing as faultless disagreement: either the two parties genuinely disagree, hence if one is right the other is wrong, or the two parties are both right, but their apparent disagreement boils down to a misunderstanding. The upshot of my paper, then, is to show that there is not much disagreement between the *contextualist* account, which models the taste parameter as an implicit argument to the taste predicate, and the *relativist* account, which models it as a parameter of the circumstance of evaluation. The choice between the two accounts, at least when talking about taste, is thus itself largely a matter of taste.

1 Setting the Stage

Predicates of personal taste – words like 'delicious', 'tasty', 'lousy', 'fun', etc. – give rise to a puzzle. Consider this dialogue between Tarek and Inma, who have just tasted some soybean ice-cream:

1. Tarek: This is delicious.

2. Inma: That's not true. This isn't delicious at all.

On the one hand, we are inclined to say that Tarek and Inma disagree. After all, Tarek says that the soybean ice-cream is delicious, and Inma says precisely the opposite. But on the other hand, we are also inclined to say that Tarek and Inma may both be right, and that their seemingly contradictory utterances may be true together. So here comes a puzzle:

a: For any two utterances u_1 and u_2, the utterer of u_1 disagrees with the utterer of u_2 only if the one denies what the other asserts, which, in turn, means that if u_1 is true, then u_2 is false, and if u_1 is false, then u_2 is true.

b: The utterer of 1 (Tarek) disagrees with the utterer of 2 (Inma).

c: On the assumption that Tarek finds the soybean ice-cream delicious, and that Inma does not, 1 is a true utterance, and so is 2.

The problem is that a, b and c, while plausible on their own, lead to contradiction.

For "relativists" like Peter Lasersohn or Max Kölbel, the way out of the puzzle lies in rejecting a.[1] My own way out of the puzzle will be to reject either b or c, on a case to case basis. I shall suggest that the puzzle stems from an equivocation regarding the term of disagreement. Suppose that Tarek utters 1 while holding a cherry in his fingers, even though he means

1 Cf. Lasersohn: "If you say that roller coasters are fun, and I say they are not, I am negating the same content which you assert, and directly contradicting you. Nonetheless, both our utterances can be true (relative to their separate contexts)" (2005: 645). See also Kölbel (2002). Admittedly, the relativist account of John MacFarlane is different from Lasersohn's and immune to the argument from semantic equivalence as presented in section 2. Nevertheless, if I am correct that faultless disagreement is an illusion that dispells upon closer analysis, as I will argue in section 3, then my argument undermines the central motivation even for MacFarlanian relativism in the case of taste.

to be saying of the ice-cream that it is delicious, and suppose that when Inma denies that it is delicious, she means to be denying that the cherry is delicious, thinking that it is what Tarek was referring to. Inma and Tarek disagree in the sense that neither takes the other to be saying something true. However, this "disagreement" is nothing more than a misunderstanding. When the two parties genuinely disagree, we want it to be the case that if one party is right, the other one can't be right. So we accept that a dialogue such as Inma's and Tarek's triggers both the intuition that if what Tarek says is true, then what Inma says can't be true, and the intuition that Tarek and Inma, if sincere, are both saying true things. But the two intuitions go obviously against each other, and to see which intuition wins, one needs further information on the context in which the dialogue is taking place. If the two parties mean to be expressing judgments whose truth depends on their own taste, then they may both be right, but their disagreement will be spurious. If, on the other hand, they intend their judgments to apply universally, to people in general, then they disagree indeed, but, I submit, only one party will get it right.

One thing that I would like to emphasize at the very outset is that the relativist "solution" to the puzzle is not much of a solution at all. For assume that Tarek's utterance of 1 expresses a content whose truth value is a function of a taste parameter, and suppose that, in the actual world, it takes value True when evaluated at Tarek's taste, and False when evaluated at Inma's. If Tarek is a competent speaker and is aware that different people like different things, he must be aware that the content that he is asserting is true or false depending on the value assigned to the

taste parameter. In the parallel modal case, we are aware that the content that we assert may be true at the actual world while false at some counterfactual state of affairs. We often forget about this, because the world that we are talking about is, by default, the actual world. Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that we intend the sentences that we utter to be evaluated for their truth at some other world. This happens in conditional reasoning, as when we start by saying "suppose that...." and we continue in the indicative mood. Then all the assertions that follow will be evaluated at the (closest) world in which the supposition holds, and not necessarily at the actual world itself. Similarly, when we talk about fiction, as when we say that Sherlock Holmes lived in Baker Street, the asserted sentence is to be evaluated for truth at the world of fiction, rather than at our own reality.[2]

Now, if we assume that speakers are not "semantically blind" about taste predicates, then in uttering 1, Tarek must intend his claim to be evaluated for its truth value not just at some particular world (presumably the actual world), but also at some particular taste. If Tarek intends his claim to be evaluated at his own taste, and if Inma intends her claim to be evaluated at her own taste, then the relativist has given us no account of their *disagreement*. (Of course, if Tarek intends his claim to be evaluated at some universal standards of taste, and if Inma does so, too, then sure they genuinely disagree, but only one of them will be right.)

2 For an analysis of fictional discourse along these lines, see e.g. Predelli (2005: 54).

2 Contextualism vs. Relativism: What Difference Does It Make?

In this section, I am going to show that the contextualist semantics (CS), in which the taste parameter is treated as an implicit argument to the taste predicate, and the relativist semantics (RS), in which it is treated as a parameter of the circumstance of evaluation, on a par with the possible world, are, *qua* semantic frameworks, much more in agreement than is commonly believed. I will show that the two accounts are equivalent by defining a bi-directional translation procedure T between the two formal languages for which the following holds. Let S_c and S_r be respectively sentences in the languages of CS and of RS, let f_1, f_2 be assignments of values to free variables, and let w be a world of evaluation and u a "taste" of evaluation. Then:

- S_r is true with respect to f_1, w and u iff $T(S_r)$ is true with respect to f_1^T and w, where assignment f_1^T is defined in terms of f_1 and u.
- S_c is true with respect to f_2 and w iff $T(S_c)$ is true with respect to f_2, w and u^T, where u^T is a taste value obtained directly from f_2;

The method that I am using is classic, and the result obtained, *qua* a formal result, should be old news to anyone familiar with modal logic.[3] But I still take it to be worthwhile to lay down the result, as it appears to be widely ignored by both camps in the debate on contextualism vs. relativism.

Before I go into the technicalities, some clarifications are in order. First, both the contextualist and the relativist agree that the *truth value* of a sentence containing a predicate of taste depends on the taste parameter.

3 In essence, the equivalence between the relativist and the contextualist semantics of taste predicates derives from the equivalence between modal logic S5 and monadic predicate logic.

That on which they disagree is how to construe this taste parameter: as an implicit argument associated with the predicate, or as a parameter in the circumstance of evaluation. But there are those who might deny that the truth value of claims about taste depends on any taste parameter. Invariantists thus hold that the truth of sentences such as "soybean ice-cream is tasty" depends only on what the world is like: either our world is one in which it is tasty, or one in which it isn't, and the context in which the sentence is used or evaluated for truth plays no other role than to determine the world of evaluation. There are also those who hold that claims about taste *lack* truth value, and are to be put on a par with expressives such as 'yum' or 'yack'. In this paper, I am simply leaving such views out of consideration.[4]

Secondly, most predicates of taste appear to require at least *two* parameters. One is the taste parameter, and it is this parameter that concerns us here. But, as with gradable adjectives in general, the truth value may also be affected by the relevant comparison class. Hold the value of the taste parameter fixed – let it be Mary's taste – and suppose that, pointing at some oreo-cookies, she says "Those are delicious." If she says this at some fancy tea party, where the oreo-cookies are the least tasty compared to the rest, we might have the intuition that she is saying something false. But if the relevant alternatives are now only some stale cookies that have laid open in the cupboard for a month, we will have the intuition that by uttering that same sentence, in reference to the same cookies, she is saying something true – even though neither the cookies nor her taste have changed. This being noted, in what follows, I am going

4 Lasersohn, in his paper, compellingly argues against those views.

to ignore the role of the comparison class in the semantics of taste predicates.

2.1. Contextualist Semantics (CS) for Taste Predicates

The target for CS is a small fragment of English, containing words like 'delicious', 'lousy', 'fun', demonstrative and 3rd person pronouns, names, basic quantifiers (everyone, someone) and basic modalities (necessarily, possibly). The formal language is just the language of quantified modal logic, but the semantics is as simple as it can get: we ignore accessibility relations and keep the universe fixed across worlds. Also, even though we have demonstratives in our target language, we will translate them as free variables, so that we do not even need two-dimensional semantics. The only novelty is that we have one distinguished variable, x_T, which we use for the implicit argument associated with any taste predicate. For the sake of simplicity, let the values assignable to this variable be just ordinary individuals. The main task of what we informally think of as *context* is to provide an assignment of values to free variables, and to supply the world at which the sentence is to be evaluated for its truth value.

Language.

$\mathbf{L}_{CS}$:= P_1^0, P_2^0,..., $P^1{}_1$,..., $P^n{}_1$,...; x_T, x_1, x_2, ...; c_1, c_2, ...; $\neg$, $\wedge$, $\forall$, $\exists$, $\Box$, $\Diamond$.

Syntax. The standard rules for well-formedness, which I will not bother to spell. The only somewhat unusual constraint is that for any atomic sentence, variable x_T may occur at most once, and it may only occur in the very last position. [5]

5 For exemple, $P^2x_Tx_T$ and $P^2x_Tx_1$ are not well-formed, while $P^2x_1x_1$ or $P^2x_1x_T$ are. We need the "at most once" constraint for the equivalence results. However, the language thus constrained seems fine for modeling natural language, because, at least in English, we

Semantics.

Σ is a **structure** iff$_{df}$ it is of the form $\langle U, W, V\rangle$, where U is the universe, W is the set of possible worlds, and for every P^n_i, $V(P_i) \subseteq W \times \wp(U^n)$ and $\forall w \in W$ $\exists s \in \wp(U^n)$ $V(P_i)=\langle w, s\rangle$. (This is just a cumbersome way of saying that V is a valuation that maps any n-place predicate to a function that maps possible worlds to sets of n-tuples of individuals.)

The truth value of a sentence is defined at a **model**. A model is a triple of the form $\langle \Sigma, w, f\rangle$, where Σ is a structure, w a designated world, and f an assignment of values to free variables. The truth definition is recursive and standard, but in order to forestall any possible misinterpretation, let me spell out the usual clauses:

Σ, w, f $\models P c_1,..., c_m, x_1,..., x_n$ iff$_{df}$ $\langle w, \langle V(c_1),..., V(c_m), f(x_1),..., f(x_n)\rangle\rangle \in V(P)$
(where x_n is possibly x_T)

Σ, w, f $\models \forall x_i \psi x_i$ iff$_{df}$ for every assignment f', if f' is like f except at most for x_i, then Σ, w, f' $\models \psi x_i$

Σ, w, f $\models \Box\psi$ iff$_{df}$ for every w': Σ, w', f $\models \psi$

Σ, w, f $\models \chi \wedge \psi$ iff$_{df}$ Σ, w, f $\models \chi$ and Σ, w, f $\models \psi$

Σ, w, f $\models \neg\chi$ iff$_{df}$ Σ, w, f $\not\models \chi$

We define $\exists$ by means of $\neg\forall\neg$ and $\Diamond$ by means of $\neg\Box\neg$ as usual. So both the syntax and the semantics for $\mathbf{L}_{CS}$ are perfectly standard.

To see how this semantics works, take the sentence "This is delicious", as used to express one's own taste. Its translation will be DELICIOUS x_1 x_T, so,

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do not have atomic expressions that involve *two* taste parameters. As for the constraint that x_T always occurs at the end, it is only there to make it easier to define the translation between the two formal languages, but nothing important hinges on it.

for instance, if Tarek utters this sentence while referring to the chocolate cake, the assignment of values relevant to the truth of his utterance will send x_1 to the cake at stake and x_T to Tarek, and if Inma utters the same sentence in reference to a certain cookie, one will assign that cookie to x_1 and Inma to x_T. And if Tarek, or anyone else for that matter, uses the sentence to make a universal claim, meaning that the cake is delicious *for everyone*, then the translation is going to be $\forall x_T$ DELICIOUS x_1 x_T, and the relevant assignment will send x_1 to the cake.[6]

2.2. Relativist Semantics (RS) for taste predicates

Let us now consider the relativist "sibling" of contextualist semantics. The difference between the two accounts, in rough lines, is that what a contextualist translates by a 2-place predicate one of whose arguments is occupied by the taste variable x_T, a relativist will translate by a 1-place predicate. But on the semantic side, the interpretation of such a one-place predicate provided by a structure of interpretation Σ is not simply a mapping from possible worlds to sets of individuals, the way it works in the contextualist approach. Rather, it is a mapping from *pairs* ⟨possible world, individual⟩ to sets of individuals. The framework that follows is as in Lasersohn (2005), except for some minor differences.[7]

6 More plausibly, it is *generic* claims, rather than strictly speaking *universal* claims, that people tend to make using taste predicates. Since generics are a difficult topic on their own, I will only talk of the stronger, universal readings.

7 Among those minor differences, a major one is that we, unlike Lasersohn, have a universal operator on the taste parameter, ■. Another is that Lasersohn also has in the formal language a class of predicate modifiers 'for c' (where c is a constant, e.g. one that translates a proper name like 'Tarek'), and which are meant to translate complex expressions such as 'tasty for Tarek'. On the semantic side, 'for Tarek' works as a rigidifier: it makes the semantic value of 'tasty for Tarek' a constant function in the taste parameter, whose value, for any other individual, is the same as the value that

Language.

$\mathbf{L_{RS}}$:= $P_1^0, P_2^0,..., P^1{}_1,..., P^n{}_1,...; x_T, x_1, x_2, ...; c_1, c_2, ...; \neg, \wedge, \vee, \forall, \exists, \Box, \Diamond, \blacksquare$.

Syntax. The usual rules, plus: if ψ is a formula, so is $\blacksquare\psi$.

Semantics. Σ is a **structure** iff$_{df}$ it is of the form $\langle U, W, V\rangle$, where, U is the universe, W is the set of possible worlds, and for every $P^n{}_i$, $V(P^n{}_i) \subseteq W \times U \times \wp(U^n)$ and $\forall w \in W\ \forall u \in U\ \exists s \in \wp(U^n)\ V(P^n{}_i) = \langle w, u, s\rangle$.
(Again, this is a complicated way of saying that V is a valuation that maps any n-place predicate to a function that maps pairs consisting of a possible world and of an individual to sets of n-tuples of individuals.)

The **truth** of a sentence is defined at a **model**, which is now a quadruple $\langle \Sigma, w, u, f\rangle$, where Σ is a structure, w a designated world, u a designated individual (who serves as the value for the taste parameter), and f an assignment of values to free variables. The definition of truth is recursive and standard, but in order to forestall any possible misinterpretation, let me spell it out:

$\Sigma, w, u, f \models Pc_1,..., c_m, x_1,..., x_n$ iff$_{df}$ $\langle w, u, \langle V(c_1),..., V(c_m), f(x_1),..., f(x_n)\rangle\rangle \in V(P)$

$\Sigma, w, u, f \models \forall x_i \psi x_i$ iff$_{df}$ for every f' s.t. f is like f' except at most for x_i, we have $\Sigma, w, u, f' \models \psi x_i$

'tasty' alone takes at Tarek. The way a contextualist would translate the expression 'for c' is simply by making explicit the second argument of 'tasty', which, when *implicit*, is taken account of through the taste variable x_T. E.g. while 'tasty' is translated by Px_1x_T, 'tasty for Tarek' is translated as Px_1c_1, where the interpretation of c_1 is Tarek. I will leave the 'for'-construction out of consideration. It is a boring but easy exercise to define extensions of CS and RS that make room for 'for' while remaining equivalent. Finally, Lasersohn's framework is cast within a Kaplanian framework, hence, besides the possible world parameter, it also uses a time parameter and a context parameter, both of which we are ignoring here.

$\Sigma, w, u, f \models \Box\psi$ iff$_{df}$ for every w', we have $\Sigma, w', u, f \models \psi$

$\Sigma, w, u, f \models \blacksquare\psi$ iff$_{df}$ for every u', we have $\Sigma, w, u', f \models \psi$

$\Sigma, w, u, f \models \chi \wedge \psi$ iff$_{df}$ $\Sigma, w, u, f \models \chi$ and $\Sigma, w, u, f \models \psi$

$\Sigma, w, u, f \models \neg\chi$ iff$_{df}$ $\Sigma, w, u, f \not\models \chi$

As usual, we define $\exists$, $\Diamond$ by means of $\neg$, $\forall$, $\Box$. Again, then, the syntax and the semantics for $\mathbf{L}_{\mathbf{RS}}$ are perfectly standard. As in the case of CS, we take the usual semantics for modal predicate logic. Furthermore, it is a two-dimensional modal logic, since in addition to the possible world parameter w, we have the taste parameter u, with respect to which truth is recursively defined. The only expression that requires recursion on the taste parameter is the *universal taste operator* $\blacksquare$, which we are going to use in translating universal taste claims.[8] So for instance, if "This is delicious" is used by a person to express people's taste in general, in the sense of "delicious to everyone", its translation will be $\blacksquare$DELICIOUS x_1, and the relevant assignment will send x_1 to the object referred to with 'this'. But if a person uses the same sentence to express her own taste, the translation will be DELICIOUS x_1. If Tarek uses the sentence, then, given an assignment of value to x_1, it will (normally) be evaluated for truth at the circumstance whose taste parameter is set to value Tarek, and if it is Inma who uses the same sentence, then the value will be (normally) set to Inma.

8 It is not clear whether Lasersohn would acknowledge such readings at all – readings on which claiming that something is fun is to claim that it is *universally* fun. If he would, my hunch is that, rather than having a universal taste operator $\blacksquare$, he would use the construction 'for x' and bind the variable x with a regular $\forall$. Surprisingly, Lasersohn (2005) gives a language without quantifiers, and without any expression whose semantics requires a clause recursive on the taste parameter.

2.3. Equivalence

To show the equivalence between $\mathbf{L}_{CS}$ and $\mathbf{L}_{RS}$, we need to define a suitable translation between the two languages. This is made easy by the fact that $\mathbf{L}_{CS}$ has a distinguished variable x_T (and also, that we do not have any accessibility relations on the taste dimension).[9] Here is the proposed translation T that takes $\mathbf{L}_{RS}$-formulas to $\mathbf{L}_{CS}$-formulas:

$T(Pc_1,..,c_m, x_1,..., x_n) = P^T c_1,..., c_m, x_1,..., x_n, x_T$
$T(\neg\chi) = \neg T(\chi)$
$T(\phi\wedge\chi) = T(\phi)\wedge T(\chi)$
$T(\forall x_i\psi x_i) = \forall x_i T(\psi x_i)$
$T(\Box\psi) = \Box T(\psi)$
$T(\blacksquare\psi) = \forall x_T T(\psi)$.

Only the first and the last line are interesting. Remember that $\mathbf{L}_{SR}$ handles the dependence of taste predicates on individuals by means of an additional parameter in the definition of truth. $\mathbf{L}_{CR}$, on the other hand, deploys no such parameter, but it has an additional argument place in every taste predicate. That is what the translation function T reflects. In fact, T "opens" a new argument place in every predicate, be it a taste predicate or not. For the latter, though, this argument will be idle.[10] What

9 Even if we had accessibility relations on the taste parameter, that would only be a minor complication. In what follows, I rely on some known results from modal logic. See e.g. van Benthem (1983: 40).

10 In this respect, there will be a difference between the "direct" translation of a taste-insensitive predicate in the language of CS, which is represented by a one-place predicate letter P, and the translation that we would get if we first translated it in the language of RS and then translated it into $\mathbf{L}_{CS}$ using the translation procedure T, since, then, it will be represented by a *two*-place predicate letter P^T. On the semantic side, this difference is hardly noticeable – for, if V(P) is a function constant in the parameter u, then $V(P^T)$ will be similarly "constant" in its last argument: if there is $u\in U$ such that

the first clause says is, roughly, that if P is a (n+m-place) predicate in the language $\mathbf{L}_{RS}$, then take a (n+m+1-place) predicate P^T in the language $\mathbf{L}_{CS}$, and use variable x_T in its last argument place. We also need to ensure that the structures of interpretation Σ of **RS** and Σ^T of **CS** will interpret the two predicates alike:

- if $\langle w, u, \langle u_1,..., u_{n+m}\rangle\rangle \in V^{\Sigma}(P)$, then $\langle w, \langle u_1,..., u_{n+m}, u\rangle\rangle \in V^{\Sigma T}(P^T)$.

What translation *T* does, too, in the last clause, is translate ■, the universal modal operator on the taste dimension, by the universal quantifier on the taste variable x_T.

In the other direction, translation *T* maps sentences of $\mathbf{L}_{CS}$ to sentences of $\mathbf{L}_{RS}$ as follows:

$T(Px_1..,c_1.., x_n,.., c_m, x_T) = P^T x_1..,c_1.., x_n,.., c_m$
$T(Pc_1,..., c_m, x_1,..., x_n) = Pc_1,..., c_m,..., x_1,..., x_n$
$T(\neg\chi) = \neg T(\chi)$
$T(\phi\wedge\chi) = Tr(\phi)\wedge T(\chi)$
$T(\forall x_i \psi x_i) = \forall x_i T(\psi x_i)$, for any $x_i \neq x_T$
$T(\forall x_T \psi x_T) = \blacksquare T(\psi)$
$T(\Box\psi) = \Box T(\psi)$.

Again, we must ensure that the structures of interpretation Σ of CS and Σ^T of RS will interpret the atomic predicates alike:

- if $\langle w, \langle u_1,..., u_{n+m}, u\rangle\rangle \in V^{\Sigma}(P)$, then $\langle w, u, \langle u_1,..., u_{n+m}\rangle\rangle \in V^{\Sigma T}(P^T)$;
- if $\langle w, \langle u_1,..., u_{n+m}\rangle\rangle \in V^{\Sigma}(P)$, then $\langle w, v, \langle u_1,..., u_{n+m}\rangle\rangle \in V^{\Sigma T}(P)$, for all $v \in U$.[11]

$\langle u_1,..., u_n, u\rangle \in V(P^T)$, then any $v \in U$ must be such that $\langle u_1,..., u_n, v\rangle \in V(P^T)$.

11 Recall that in the language of CS, the taste argument is only associated with taste predicates. That is why we need the second clause in the translation procedure, as well as this constraint on interpretation structures: its task is to prevent the possibility of a taste-insensitive predicate from $\mathbf{L}_{CS}$ being interpreted, in RS, by a function that

The following equivalence results follow straightforwardly from the definitions of *T*. Anyone not immediately convinced is invited to verify them by induction on the complexity of ψ:

claim 1: $\Sigma, w, u, f \models_{RS} \psi$ i f f $\Sigma^T, w, f^T \models_{CS} T(\psi)$,
where $f^T(x_T)=u$ and f^T is otherwise like f

claim 2: $\Sigma, w, f \models_{CS} \psi$ i f f $\Sigma^T, w, f(x_T), f \models_{RS} T(\psi)$

3 Disagreement vs. Misunderstanding

In the introduction, I argued that even if we were to take the phenomenon of "faultless disagreement" for granted, contents that are functions of a taste parameter would not account for it, because a competent speaker who asserts such a content must intend this content to be evaluated for truth with respect to some particular taste value. Hence if Tarek asserts a content that he intends to be evaluated for truth at his own taste, and if Inma asserts the negation of that content while intending it to be evaluated at her own taste, then we shouldn't say that they disagree. They will only disagree if the one's assertion and the other's denial of one and the same content are to be evaluated for truth at one and the same taste. But then only one of the two parties will be saying something true.

At any rate, the fact that Lasersohnian relativist semantics cannot account for faultless disagreement is not necessarily bad news for the relativist, because, as I will now argue, there is no such thing as faultless disagreement to begin with.

So consider the following dialogue:

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varies in the taste parameter.

3. Tarek: Paris is lovely.
4. Inma: Oh, come on! That's not true. Paris is not lovely at all.

Recall that the puzzle was that the two equally plausible intuitions that arise in relation to such dialogues lead to contradiction. One is that Tarek and Inma disagree. After all, Tarek says that Paris is lovely, and Inma says the opposite, namely, that Paris is not lovely. And if they disagree, then if one is right, the other must be wrong. But this conflicts with the other intuition, namely that if Tarek and Inma are sincere, and if Tarek finds Paris lovely and Inma does not, then they are both saying something true.

My goal in this section is to show that a more careful analysis of the data demonstrates that, given any case of *prima facie* disagreement, further considerations about the context and the ways in which the conversation might develop make it possible to decide whether it was a case of genuine disagreement, or only disagreement that arose from a misunderstanding.

Let us first note that by acknowledging that one has been talking about one's own taste suggests that there was no genuine disagreement in the first place. Thus one way in which Inma and Tarek may have resolved their disagreement would be to recognize that what may be lovely for the one need not be lovely for the other:

5. Tarek: OK. To my taste, Paris is lovely, that's all I'm saying.
6. Inma: OK, and to my taste, Paris isn't lovely at all; that's all I'm saying.

In 5 and 6, Tarek and Inma have made it explicit that in claiming that Paris is lovely, they were talking of themselves and of their own taste. In other words, in 5 and 6 they have articulated the value for the taste parameter. This they can do on the assumption that the loveliness of something

depends not only on the thing itself, but also on one's taste. By acknowledging that in 3 and 4 they were talking about their respective taste, Inma and Tarek will realize that, even though apparently saying contradictory things, their claims may be simultaneously true. And if both may be true, then they are not contradicting each other – as they realize themselves in 5 and 6, having moved from "Oh yes/Oh no" dialogue to "OK/OK" dialogue.

Now, even though, in matters of taste, people sometimes reach some kind of agreement by realizing that they like different things and that their respective taste partly determines the truth of what they are saying, at other times they persist disagreeing, as if there were a matter of fact as to whether a given thing had a given property (such as loveliness) or not. In Tarek and Inma's episode, it is easy to imagine that they may never resolve their disagreement, even after they have come to realize that the truth of their utterances *may* vary with taste:

7. Tarek: Paris is lovely! And it's not just that *I* find it lovely; Paris is lovely *tout court*.
8. Inma: No, that's not true. Paris is not lovely – though I understand that for many people it may be.

What do people who disagree whether something is lovely (delicious, interesting, fun) *tout court* actually disagree about, if the truth of what they are saying depends indeed on a taste parameter? For, if Inma and Tarek were to supply different values for this parameter, and if their seemingly contradictory utterances are both true because of being evaluated at different values, there would be no matter for disagreement.

A plausible answer is that in the case of genuine disagreement, the two

parties agree on the value supplied to the taste parameter, and disagree as to whether, given that value, a given thing is lovely or not. The two parties cannot be both right, and in this respect, their disagreement is on a par with ordinary disagreement about facts. If Inma claims that their friend Yoko has never been to Paris, and Tarek says that she has, then they disagree as to whether Yoko has ever been to Paris or not. That is a matter of fact, and only one of them can be right, depending on whether Yoko has indeed ever been to Paris. Similarly, if Tarek says that Paris is lovely, *simply lovely*, and Inma denies that, what is likely to be at stake, I suggest, is that they intend to be making *universally valid*, or, at least, *generally* valid claims. Tarek is roughly saying that Paris is lovely for people in general, and that is what Inma is denying (though she accepts that it may be lovely for many people). To resolve this sort of disagreement, they would need to determine if Paris is lovely on such universal standards. Once this is determined (say, by some sort of survey),[12] the one who is wrong should admit that she was wrong and that her claim was false, and accordingly revise her beliefs. For instance, for the particular example that we are considering, it would be reasonable for Inma to accept that Paris *is* lovely

12 To determine whether something is lovely, or tasty, or fun, for people *in general*, a survey will work only if we assume the 1st person authority, that is, if we assume that everyone knows what is lovely/tasty/fun for himself or herself. Expressions of taste do appear to obey the first person authority in the way in which, say, belief reports do. If I sincerely report my own beliefs, then it seems that I cannot go wrong. Similarly, if we are deciding the issue of whether something is tasty *to me*, it seems plausible to think that no one can tell better than myself whether or not that is the case. However, whether this assumption is correct or not is not a properly *semantic* issue. Both the contextualist and the relativist semantics considered in the previous section have the advantage of staying neutral on the issue of what it is that determines whether or not something is fun, delicious or lovely for a given value for the taste parameter.

according to some generally accepted standards, and that hers are an exception. The situation appears to be pretty much the same as with factual disagreement. If Inma is shown a picture of Yoko taken in Paris, she would presumably decide that, after all, Yoko has been to Paris, and admit that what she had previously claimed was false.

Finally, disagreement, in the sense of taking the other party to be saying something false, sometimes comes from misunderstanding. So let us turn back to the dialogue between Inma and Tarek, repeated below:

9. Tarek: Paris is lovely.

10. Inma: Oh, come on! Paris is not lovely at all.

Our immediate reaction, as previously noted, is to take Tarek and Inma to be disagreeing with each other. But suppose that to Tarek's insisting that Paris is surely lovely, Inma replies:

11. Inma: Paris is all but lovely. She's arrogant and fake.

It is at this point that Tarek realizes that he and Inma are not talking about the same Paris. While he meant to be talking of the French capital, Inma, who had been reading the magazine *Vogue*, took him to be talking of Paris Hilton, whose photo was on the cover page.

It happens often enough that people engage in a debate simply because they think that they are talking of the same thing, while they are actually talking about different things. This is what happens in 9 and 10. Tarek, thinking of where he would like to go, was talking of the city, but in doing so, he overlooked the fact that Inma was reading about Paris Hilton and was therefore likely to take him to be talking of *that Paris*, not of the city.

The lesson to be drawn from the case of 9 and 10 is that it often happens

that people disagree, in the sense that they take the other person to be saying something false, when there are virtually no facts that they disagree about. Or, more accurately, the facts that their disagreement turns upon are facts about the context and their use of words. In our example, Tarek believes that his use of the name 'Paris' enables him to refer unambiguously to the French capital, while Inma believes that Tarek's use of the name 'Paris' was meant to stand for Paris Hilton. So even here, there is something factual that Inma and Tarek disagree about, namely, the issue of which Paris is being referred to with the name 'Paris'.[13] But, of course, they do not realize that their disagreement is due to a lack of agreement on what their words stand for. At any rate, such disagreement that stems from a misunderstanding does not qualify as genuine disagreement. And I submit that many cases of apparent disagreement on matters of taste conceal such a misunderstanding.

4 The Argument from What Is Said

Let me take stock. In the last section, I argued that there is no such thing as faultless disagreement. Back in section 1, I argued that even if there were faultless disagreement, contents who truth value varies with taste could not account for the phenomenon on their own. And in section 2, I showed that the contextualist and the relativist semantics are notational variants of one another. This does not mean yet that there might not be other considerations that tell in favor or against the one or the other approach. So what I want to do in this last section is to look at some

13 Or, if you think that the name of the French capital and the name of Mrs. Hilton are actually different, albeit homophonic names, then Tarek and Inma will disagree on the question of which of the two names occurs in the sentence that Tarek uttered.

considerations related to the notion of 'what is said' that, at a first glance, appear to tell against the contextualist approach. However, I will argue that those considerations are far from being conclusive.

It is often believed that the contextualist account of taste predicate commits you to a wrong construal of the notion of what is said. Let me explain the problem on an example. Consider:

1. This is delicious. (uttered by Tarek in reference to the chocolate cake)
2. This is delicious. (uttered by Inma in reference to the same chocolate cake)
3. This is delicious. (uttered by Tarek in reference to soybean ice-cream)

Let us suppose that in the three cases, the speakers clearly mean to be expressing their own taste. Now arguably, there is a strong intuition that Tarek in 1 and Inma in 2 have said the same thing, namely, that the cake is delicious, and arguably, there is an equally strong intuition that what Tarek said in 1 is different than what he said in 3. Let us, for the sake of the argument, take those intuitions for granted. Then they might seem to pose a problem for the contextualist account for the following reason. The semantic representation of Tarek's utterance of 1 is not any more similar to the representation Inma's utterance than it is to the representation of his utterance of 3. Indeed, 1 and 3 will only differ on the value assigned to the variable x_T, while 1 and 3 similarly differ only on the value assigned to the variable x_1 (taking DELICIOUS x_1 x_T as a translation for "This is delicious").

By contrast, a relativist might claim that this is not at all a problem for his or her account, because what is said, on the relativist account, are content whose truth varies with taste, hence contents of which the values set for the taste parameter are not part, while the values assigned to the

variables are. And such contents are the same for 1 and 2, namely DELICIOUS x_1 [$f(x_1)$= chocolate cake], while those of 1 and 3 are different, since different values get assigned to x_1.

We should not dismiss easily the question of how well a given semantic account, that is, an account of meaning and truth, extends into an account of *what is said*.[14] Nevertheless, it is not clear that these considerations cut sharply in favor of the relativist account, or undermine the contextualist account. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed argument, so let me simply outline a solution to this problem of what is said.

In other places (2006, 2007), I have argued that if we want to have a technical notion of what is said that will account both for the intuitive notion of what is said and for the use of the locution 'what is said', then it is best to identify what is said with lexically encoded meaning. This leads to the view that Tarek said in 1 the same thing as he did in 3. If we ignore the taste parameter for the moment, he will assert the property of being delicious; or, if you prefer, the propositional function that, given an object, returns the proposition that this object is delicious, or whatever you take to be the content of the open sentence DELICIOUS x_1.[15] The intuition that Tarek said different things is explained by the fact that Tarek was *talking about* different things, and was asserting deliciousness *of* those different things,

14 Many people have argued, though, that the notions of semantic content and of what is said are quite independent. In the recent literature, see e.g. Borg (2004) or Cappelen and Lepore (1997).

15 For the sake of simplicity, I continue to ignore the question of whether the word 'this' contributes to meaning (and thereby to what is said) only a place-holder (in guise of the variable x_1), or also something like the condition of being salient, presumably lexically encoded in the demonstrative. I have discussed the issue at length in Stojanovic (2002).

namely, the cake vs. the ice-cream. So in sum, Tarek said the same thing, but he said it *about* different things.[16]

The fact that Tarek was talking about different things also explains why the simple report that he said the same thing on both occasions appears to be bad. The reason is that when we report what is said as being the same, we normally assume that it was said or asserted about one and the same thing. Note, though, that if we make it explicit what Tarek was talking about on each occasion, the report becomes correct: "Tarek said the same thing twice, namely that a certain thing was delicious; he first said it about the chocolate cake, and later on, about the ice-cream."

If we start with an account of what is said along the lines just outlined, motivated by independent considerations, then what remains to be explained is why when we truly report Tarek and Inma as having said the same thing, when Tarek is expressing his own taste and Inma her own, we do not need to make it explicit whose taste each was talking about.

However, the same phenomenon can be observed more generally with the cases in which what one is talking about is oneself. Consider:

4. I love soybean ice-cream.

Suppose that Tarek utters 4, and then Lydia, on some later occasion, utters that same sentence. Then one can truly reply to Lydia: "Tarek said that, too." To be sure, the reply, as it stands, is ambiguous between reporting Tarek as having said that *Lydia* loved soybean ice-cream vs. that *he himself* loved it. But with enough contextual background, the second

16 The idea that in addition to the notion of what is saidm we also need the notion of the object or individual about which or whom something has been said, may be traced at least to Donnellan (1966).

reading, which we might call the "sloppy" reading, can be made dominant: for instance, if, in the context of the report, it is known that Tarek has no idea who Lydia is, and could not have been talking about her. At any rate, it is noteworthy that in replying that she said the same thing as Tarek did, we do not have to make it explicit that Tarek was talking of himself.

The general rule thus appears to be that when a given speaker A is talking of himself, and you report another speaker B as having said the same thing, we assume that B was talking either of the same thing as A (hence of A himself), or that she was talking of herself. With this assumption in place, we can straighforwardly account for the fact that when Tarek, talking of himself and referring to the chocolate cake, uttered the sentence "This is delicious", and when Inma, talking of herself and of the same cake, uttered the same sentence, not only did they say the same thing, but it is also correct to report them as having done so, without having to point out that different values for the taste parameter were relevant to the truth of what they were saying.[17]

It would be hasty to conclude that it makes no difference whatsoever whether or not you use variables (or implicit arguments) for something on

17 One might object that this cannot be the end of the story, because, when Inma utters 2, and someone replies to her, "That's what Tarek said, too", the reply does not seem to be ambiguous: the reading on which Tarek would have said that *according to Inma's taste*, the cake was delicious, is practically unavailable. The best reply to the objection, I think, is that the unavailability of this reading is a pragmatic matter. We don't get this reading because it is very unlikely that Tarek would have been making any statement about Inma's taste. What corroborates the pragmatic explanation is that if Tarek had said, say, "Inma is going to love this chocolate cake", and Inma then says indeed that the cake is delicious, someone can truly reply to Inma "You know, that's what Tarek already told me." At any rate, it would take us too far to discuss in detail the practice of reporting *what is said* when the sentences at stake involve taste predicates.

which the truth value appears to depend. It is certainly true that variables may prove to be good devices to model certain bits of natural language, and that variable-free constructions may work better for some other bits. But the divide between the two traditions, as I have tried to show in the case of taste predicates, cannot solely rest upon the semantic data. Once you have collected speakers' intuitions on the truth values of sentences containing the expressions considered, it takes a bit of formal language engineering to make either the contextualist framework or the relativist framework account for the data. This suggests, time and again, that the choice between relativism and contextualism, when talking about taste, is itself pretty much a matter of taste.*

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