

To appear in *Context-dependence, Perspective and Relativity*, edited by
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Relativism, Disagreement and Predicates of Personal Taste

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Abstract

Disagreements about what is delicious, what is funny, what is morally acceptable can lead to intractable disputes between parties holding opposing views of a given subject. How should we think of such disputes? Do they always amount to genuine disagreements? The answer will depend on how we understand disagreement and how we should think about the meaning and truth of statements in these areas of discourse. I shall consider cases of dispute and disagreement where relativism about truth appears to give the best explanation of the phenomena. I will argue that we cannot explain the relativist option merely by relativizing truth to an extra parameter, such as a standard of taste, or a sense of humour. Instead, I will focus on cases where the dispute concerns whether either of the two opposing parties is judging in accordance with an existing standard, and I shall suggest that how we should think of these cases bears important affinities with rule-following considerations found in the later Wittgenstein's work.

1. *An intelligible form of relativism. Locke on the Idea of Place.*

For the purpose of fixing issues let us begin with an obviously intelligible form of relativism, first set out by John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke's case for relativism concerns judgements about whether or not an object has been

moved. Nowadays, we would say that such judgements are made with respect to a spatial frame of reference. Here is what Locke says:

...in our *idea of place*, we consider the relation of distance betwixt anything, and any two or more points, which are considered as keeping the same distance one with another, and so considered as at rest.

Thus, a company of chess-men standing on the same squares of the chess board where we left them, we say they are all in the *same place*, or unmoved, though perhaps the chess-board hath been in the meantime carried out of one room into another; because we compared them only to the parts of the chess-board which keep the same distance with one another. The chess-board, we also say, is in the same place it was, if it remain in the same part of the cabin, though perhaps the ship which it is in sails all the while. And the ship is said to be in the same place, supposing it kept the same distance with the parts of the neighbouring land, though perhaps the earth hath turned round; and so both chess-men, and board, and ship, have everyone changed place in respect of remoter bodies, which have kept the same distance from one another. But yet the distance from certain parts of the board being that which determines the place of the chess-men; and the distance from the fixed parts of the cabin (with which we made the comparison) being that which determined the place of the chess-board; and the fixed parts of the earth that by which we determined the place of the ship; these things may be said properly to be in the same place in those respects; though their distance from some other things which in this matter we did not consider, being varied, they have undoubtedly changed place in that respect; and we ourselves shall think so, when we have occasion to compare them with those other. (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk II, Ch. XIII, p.96-7)

The morals to be drawn from Locke's nice example are these:

- (i) All claims about the movement of objects are relative to some spatial frame of reference.
- (ii) Which spatial frame of reference we have in view will make a difference either to the *meaning* or *truth* of the claims we make about an object's location.

I say 'meaning *or* truth' because we can see the variability as entering the picture in different ways. For instance, we can treat the content of a claim about movement as varying from one spatial frame of reference to another, or we can keep the content of the claim the same from one context to another and see the truth or falsity varying with respect to the relevant the frame of reference. Thus the claim we make about an object being in the same location either *means* that it is in the same place relative to a particular frame of reference; or simply means the object is in the same location and is evaluated for

truth or *falsity* relative to a particular frame of reference. As we shall see, the difference between meaning and truth matters when considering other cases.

The spatial frame of reference relevant to the meaning or truth of a statement in a given discourse is either *implicit* or *explicit*. Usually it is implicit, and context makes it clear which frame of reference is in play, without interlocutors having to mention it. Note, however, that disagreements about whether an object has remained in the same place or has moved make sense *only if* both parties consider the contested claim with respect to the *same* spatial frame of reference.

Initially, two parties who implicitly relativize their claims to different frames of reference appear to be disagreeing about whether or not a chess piece has moved. But this way of making sense of the dispute will not preserve *genuine* disagreement. Once we factor in the different settings of the additional parameter affecting their claims, we can see that they are not really disagreeing with one another. Both interlocutors are right, but about (or, with respect to) different things.

2. *Relativity to standards of taste, senses of humour, moral codes, etc.*

By contrast, disagreements about what is delicious, what is funny, what is morally acceptable, can lead to intractable disputes between parties holding opposing views in a given case. So how, then, should we think of such disputes? Do they amount to genuine disagreements in every case? That depends, of course, on how we understand the notion of disagreement, and since it is the purpose of this paper to arrive at an understanding of disagreement in the case of claims involving taste predicates, no account of disagreement will be attempted at this stage. First, we need to review the possibilities.

One option — the one we have just been considering — is that the parties to certain disputes are not really disagreeing with one another once we factor in additional parameters for their claims to concern, or relativize the truth of what each claims to the

different perspectives from which their respective claims are made. In such cases, both parties can be right, but right about slightly different subject matters. So why should disputes about morals, matters of taste, or what is funny, not similarly disappear when it is pointed out that each speaker is assessing those claims relative to his or her own perspective, own sense of humour, standard of taste or moral sensibility?

A second, more controversial, option is where interlocutors *are* disagreeing, where neither has made a mistake, and where they are both right. If there are any such cases of so-called ‘faultless disagreements’ we may have made out a plausible case for relativism about judgements of taste, humour, or morals.¹ But are there any such cases? In what follows, I will cast doubt on whether there are. However, even if there are no such cases, is there still a plausible version of relativism about truth in the offing here, or do such cases simply descend into subjective claims made by each speaker talking past the other?

3. *Diagnosing the Disputes*

As John MacFarlane has pointed out, the truth of claims about what is funny, or delicious, or good, seem to depend not only on how things are with *objects* but how things are with *subjects*.² They depend, that is, on the subjectivity of the person making the judgement. Simon Blackburn, borrowing a phrase from Ronald de Sousa, has spoken about judgements in the ethical sphere possibly involving a variety of subjectivities³. And if this is right for judgements in discourse about taste, morals, or humour, and if our subjective natures or responses enter into the constitution of what we are judging to be the case in these areas — i.e. our subjectivities enter into its being the case that something is delicious, good or funny — then variation in subjectivities across individuals or

¹ The term ‘faultless disagreement’ has featured prominently in the recent relativist literature, but whatever the term, there is room for dispute about where the notion came from. I’ll leave resolution of this matter to others. The notion features most notably in the work of Crispin Wright (1992, 1995, 2006 and Max Kobel (2003)

² See MacFarlane 2007, Relativism and Disagreement, *Philosophical Studies* 132 17-31.

³ See Roland de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, p.149 (MIT 1990)

groups may lead to a relativism about the truth of claims made with respect to these areas of discourse.

But do such varieties in our subjectivities lead straightway to relativism? Our subjective natures could enter into the making of judgements about what is delicious, or funny, or right in such a way that they merely give rise to a relativity in the *content* of the claims made by individuals or populations with different subjective responses. In this way, differences in their subjectivities may account for different understandings of the terms or concepts they use in making their respective judgements: the subjective contribution would enter into the *content* of the claims they make rather than contributing to what makes those claims true.

However, if not just the nature of the judgements, but also the *truths* we aim at are partly constituted by our responses, then we may think that variation in those responses do lead to there being different *facts* about what is funny or delicious (or red for that matter). Does this lead to relativism about the truth of such judgements?

Not obviously. At this point, we need to take care to distinguish among several possible positions. The situation just countenanced might amount to a form of pluralism rather than relativism. For there might be a range of different facts about what is funny or delicious, or red, where such facts are available only to those with the requisite sensibilities. Pluralism along these lines would be a form of realism not relativism.

Yet again, another possibility is that if our subjective responses enter into the conditions for saying something is funny, this might lead us to wonder whether there was any real fact of the matter in this area at all. Thus, more is needed if we are to make out a plausible case for relativism just on the basis of different facts of the matter involving a contribution from our natures.

Are there any cases that call for a relativist treatment? I think there could be but I also think that these cases may be restricted to cases involving predicates of personal taste; in

particular cases involving taste predicates proper.⁴ It is unlikely that debates about matters as diverse as what is morally right, what is beautiful, what is delicious or disgusting, what is fun or funny, will have the same character. Perhaps we need very different treatments for each of these areas of discourse, and no single relativist treatment of truth will apply equally to all. For this reason, I shall concentrate, in what follows, on taste predicates, which may form a special case and may call uniquely for a relativist treatment. To make things more concrete I shall look in detail at a particular example.

4. *Intractable Disputes about 'delicious'*

Consider two wine critics, A and B disputing the merits of a bottle they are sharing at dinner. A says:

(1) This 2004 Denis Mortet Gevrey Chambertin is a delicious effort.

And B says:

(2) I disagree. It shows all the signs of a poor vintage in Burgundy

Each thinks he is right and the other is wrong.⁵ Neither will concede, and even if they cease arguing, each continues to believe he has made a better judgement than the other. How should we diagnose their dispute? Could they be faultlessly disagreeing?

We could appeal in our diagnosis to any of the following, familiar options⁶.

⁴ The term 'predicates of personal taste' was coined by Peter Lasershon (2005) and includes predicates like 'fun', 'tasty', etc. I shall be concerned more narrowly with predicates that apply solely to tastes and tasting; ie. taste predicates.

⁵ It should be obvious from these more realistic examples that the speakers are attempting to talk about and justify their opinions *about the wine*.

⁶ These options overlap with the four views offered by Wright in his 2006 (see pp.39-40) and MacFarlane (2007) I gratefully borrow their strategy for setting up the alternative options, even though I have taken a different way with the options.

(a) *Expressivism* – Neither A nor B is making an assertion. Each is expressing an attitude or inclination towards the wine. So there is no genuine dispute. Of course, there is still a clash of attitudes or inclinations. But each critic’s view is answerable to nothing more than his own opinion or inclination. The problems with such a view should be equally familiar. Expressivist views that the statements are not truth functional face problems with logical embedding. A could say to a friend, ‘If you think that is delicious, you’ll think this is fabulous’ Or B could opine ‘If this is delicious, then Mortet’s 2004 Marsanny must be delicious too since it is made in the same style.’ and then, going in for a little reasoning, continue: ‘But you agree that his 2004 Marsanny is not delicious, so how can you find this wine delicious?’ Without treating the embedded statements as truth-evaluable, or at least assertions, we have no account of the validity of B’s reasoning, or the workings of the logical connectives. A new logical notion of validity for non-truth evaluable statements would need to be furnished and it is far from clear how this would work in full generality.⁷ Alternatives include using a minimal truth predicate to render such statements truth-apt and thereby amenable to logic.⁸ However, this strategy utilises a distinction between genuine factual claims and other, more minimal ones, and since genuine disagreement would seem to need there to be genuine facts about which to disagree, this option appears to leave (informed) parties merely trading insubstantial counter claims. Under such circumstances, it is hard to see why participants would persist in disputing one another’s claims: the dispute would hardly be intractable.

(b) *Realism* – A and B do make truth-apt assertions, but only one of them is right, and there may be no way of telling who is right. One of them has made a mistake and

⁷ The most promising attempt to fashion something along these lines is Allan Gibbard’s *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*.

⁸ Simon Blackburn suggests that there is room to use the truth-schema to apply to ethical propositions: ‘X is good’ is true iff X is good. According to Blackburn, ‘Anyone understanding the sentence will be prepared to assert right-hand side if and only if they are prepared to assert the left, in each case voicing the attitude of approval to X.’ (Blackburn 1998, 79)

neither we, nor they, may ever be in a position to know which of them it is. This is the least palatable option, so to speak, since it supposes that the truth of judgements of taste are settled by reference to matters of fact which may forever elude us. However, matters of taste, being so closely bound up with sensory experiences, are the least plausible candidates for verification-transcendent claims. Judgements of taste engage with a subject matter that is, in so far as it is objective, epistemically accessible. (More plausible forms of realism may be possible.)

(c) *Contextualism* (varieties of) – A and B make subtly different claims, or claims whose truth depends on features of the context of utterance, and must be evaluated by reference to different perspectives, or standards of taste. The disputed claims are truth-evaluable but they concern different subject matters. So, while contextualism may help diagnose the taking of different stands by the participants, it cannot save the possibility of genuine or intractable disagreement.

(d) *Relativism* – A and B make truth apt assertions, one asserts and the other denies the same proposition. Neither has made a mistake and they are both right. Truth is relative. The key question is whether this option is really intelligible?

Notice that pluralism appears to be ruled out in this case in virtue of each party disputing the other's claims. Were one critic to call the wine earthy and short on fruit, and the other to say, it is sharp and acidic, showing signs of dilution, characteristic of the 2004 vintage, the pluralist account could say they were both right. This is real moral of Hume's story from *Don Quixote* in his celebrated essay, 'On the Standard of Taste' (Hume, 1758), where the two critics dispute whether the wine they drink from the hogshead tastes of iron or of leather. When they find the key with the leather thong at the bottom of the barrel we, and they, should conclude that they were both right. Pluralism follows, not scepticism or relativism. Their positive claims are not contradictory. Both are right but each critic is sensitive to only one of the two flavours the key and leather thong imparts

to the wine. However, in the case of A and B above since they disagree about the deliciousness of the same wine there is no room for such happy co-existence.

Having reviewed the options what should we plump for? We must, it seems, opt for one of the first three positions, or else we find ourselves on course for *Relativism*. The problem is that if we wish to keep alive the possibility of genuine disagreement, then each of (a) to (c) will be unacceptable. And it is worth noting that *Relativism* has the prima facie advantage of being the only of these options that accommodates the *decidability of taste judgements* while treating them as *genuinely disputable matters of fact*. However, the idea of the same claim — the same content — being assessed as true or false, depending on one's standards of taste has yet to be made intelligible, and there are plenty who will want to resist what seems to be relativism's contradictory nature: namely that the two critics are talking about one and the same state of affairs, forming opposing views of it, but both being right. Surely, if one of them is right, the other must be wrong, there is no way for both parties to the dispute to be right. However, resisting *Relativism* for the case at hand would mean choosing one of the other options. So which could it to be?

5. Refining Options (a) to (c)

We said that unfettered *Realism* in the area of taste judgements is implausible. We judge such matters on the basis of experience, and our concepts of taste are experiential concepts.⁹ On the other hand, *Expressivism* fails to capture what is at stake in matters of

⁹ There may be more nuanced, response-dependent, realist views in the offing; however, in the face of intractable disputed between two parties about a matter of taste, we may have to settle for the view that experience does not ensure a way of either party's decidably knowing that he is right. The facts about taste may fall within our experiential range but we may not know that they have. No doubt each party believes he is in receipt of the real facts of the matter. But since each believes the other is mistaken about the nature of his experience, each should also be prepared to entertain the idea that *he* may be the one who is mistaken about his experience. Thus even if, for the realist, the facts about taste fall within our experience, the nature of those experiences may elude us. Isidora

taste. In claiming that a wine is delicious, one is aspiring to make a claim with some objectivity: a claim about the wine itself; not just a claim about one's attitude to it. One is not merely, as John McDowell has put it, 'sounding-off'. Or else, one would be able to retreat to avowing, 'I don't know what everyone else thinks, but I think this is delicious'. People do say this, but they are not participants in the kinds of disputes we are interested in here. The trouble is that in taking the Expressivist's escape route we lose sight of the intractability of such disputes.

6. *A Better Form of Expressivism?*

It maybe that Expressivism can be fixed up. Perhaps what happens in such cases is that we judge on the basis of our experience and according to our inclinations, and then, in urging our own view on others, we expect them to share our inclinations. Thus A could be taking himself to be saying both (3) and (4):

(3) According to my standards/inclinations, W is delicious.

(4) According to our standards/inclinations, W is delicious.

A assumes, there are standards and that everyone (in some respected set of tasters, say) shares. Notice that (3) and (4) are truth-evaluable. So an implication of what A asserts is:

(5) There is a standard, it is shared by us, and according to it, W is delicious.

However, since there is no agreement, and assuming that neither side has overlooked any features of the case, clearly what A says is false, and there is no standard of taste shared by both parties. In judging according to his own standard, A is recommending the adoption of that standard by B. Is this the aimed for objectivity in judgements of taste: see things my way? There would be nothing wrong with what A asserts on the basis of

Stojanovic (2008) adopts a realist view of taste but diagnoses apparent disagreements as failures of speakers to understand their own discourse. This is not the cases I am interested in here.

his experience, but he would be guilty of a factual mistake; namely, he is wrong to suppose that B and others do share his standards of taste. Beyond this mistaken assumption, there is the Expressivist's point about him urging others to accept his standards. This could lead to a contest about who gets to set the standard. But we need not look that far since the diagnosis is already faulty. If the dispute is about standards, it is a dispute about which standard we *should* accept, it is not one about which standards *have been* accepted. Factual errors do not lead to *intractable* disputes. And if real disagreement remains a live option then relativism beckons.

7. Contextualist Treatments

In the face of such disputes, we could turn to one of the many kinds of contextualist construals of the discourse. But first we need to distinguish between treatments. Their differences concern whether claims like those made in (1) and (2), repeated here:

- (1) This 2004 Denis Mortet Gevrey Chambertin is a delicious effort.
- (2) I disagree. It shows all the signs of a poor vintage in Burgundy

Claims like (1) can be construed as:

- (i) containing a hidden variable like 'for x' where the contextually determined value of such a variable is given by the value of an additional parameter such as a standard of taste, or sense of humour¹⁰; or as containing a hidden indexical such as 'for me';
- (ii) being 'freely enriched' in context to bring in a variable not in the underlying logical form of the sentence uttered, and whose value is given by the setting of the additional parameter.¹¹
- (iii) evaluated for truth by reference to certain non-standard parameters – the position known as non-indexical contextualism¹²

¹⁰ Additional to worlds and times, perhaps.

¹¹ Options along these lines are explained in Recanati 2004.

The first of these options, in the case of first-person utterances, would treat (6) and (7) as equivalent:

(6) This wine tastes/is delicious.

(7) This wine tastes/is delicious to me.

Where I am the person uttering (6) I can treat (7) as equivalent to, or, at any rate, entirely based upon the judgement:

(7') I like the taste of this wine.

However, this cannot be right analysis of (6) because (6) and (7) can differ in truth conditions. Relative to my current context of evaluation, where I look back at judgements made earlier in my wine drinking career, I can see that I was warranted then in saying (7) or (7') but was wrong, as it happened, at that time, about (6). As children we once thought Fish Fingers were delicious but now we say they were not really delicious. However much we liked them at the time, we were just mistaken.¹³ The converse is also possible, where someone who has lost his sense of taste due to radical surgery may say, 'Why don't you drink the rest of my 1993 La Tâche? It's really delicious but it's no longer delicious to me.' Thus claims about what *we* find delicious *at a time*, and claims about what *is* delicious *at that time* do not always coincide. The upshot is that if A is really asserting (7) when he utters (6), and B in denying (6) is actually asserting the negation of (7) when taking himself to be the reference of the hidden variable or indexical, then there is no way to preserve disagreement: A and B would not be asserting and denying something with the same propositional content. Each would be saying sincerely what was delicious for them and neither would have the right to criticize the other. Notice that this problem will equally affect the second contextualist option, where

¹² A clear statement of position and the name for it was first provided by John MacFarlane 2008.

¹³ The example is due to John MacFarlane. Further examples like these were discussed in a talk he gave at the Pacific APA in April 2007.

we suppose that all utterances of (6) provide a content fixed not only by the syntax and semantics of the sentence uttered but also by pragmatic processes of free enrichment deployed by speaker and hearer to augment the linguistically encoded content with an unarticulated constituent like ‘to me’ or ‘to x’ to fill out what is said.

Non-indexical contextualism provides a much more interesting option. Here the truth of the proposition expressed by (1), or (6) would be assessed for truth relative to each speaker’s perspective, and the speakers would be asserting or denying the same content. However, the non-indexical contextualist still has more explaining to do. Simply to say that a complete proposition with no hidden indexicals or variables is true from one perspective but not from another, does not automatically show us why there should be a conflict between speakers occupying these different perspectives. Compare the situation to the case where two speakers hold different views about the truth of the sentence ‘It’s raining’ due to their different situations they are in. The same sentence may express a single proposition without an underlying slot for a variable or hidden indexical. It can be evaluated for truth relative to a further place parameter involving the (different) locations of speakers.¹⁴ If you say ‘It is raining’ when in London, and I say ‘It is not raining’ when in Paris, you might be right and so might I. But no one would think there is any real conflict between the claims each of us makes.¹⁵ Therefore, we cannot straightforwardly use this analysis to diagnose the dispute between A and B as intractable, or as involving genuine disagreement. So why should the non-indexical contextualist think there is a genuine dispute in the case of A and B’s dispute about the wines if the claims made by A and by B are to be evaluated for truth, differently, with respect to the setting of a further standard of taste parameter? Unless A and B share the same standard of taste and evaluate A’s claim about the wine with respect to that same standard surely there can be no factual disagreement between them. In this respect, different standards of taste would be like different frames of reference in the case of Locke’s question of whether the chess piece moved. Genuine disagreement requires us to evaluate the contested claim for truth

¹⁴ The parameter is further to the parameters for times and worlds.

¹⁵ I owe this comparison with the case of ‘It’s raining’ to Isidora Stojanovic, as relayed to me by Francois Recanati.

or falsity with respect to the *same* frame of reference, or standard. Thus it seems that we have still to find a satisfactory diagnosis of the dispute between A and B, which respects their disagreement. More has to be done to make out an interesting position with a claim to relativism than merely adverting to claims about what is tasty or delicious being said or evaluated relative to one or another speaker's perspective or standard of taste.

8. *Other Options?*

Are there other options we have overlooked? I think there are. Suppose we treat 'delicious' as a gradable adjective: something whose application is to be judged relative to a comparative class.¹⁶ The obvious examples are with cases like: *big* for a Scot, or, *good* for a gangster. Now we can treat 'delicious' in a similar way: e.g. *delicious* for a generic Bourgogne, or *delicious* for a 2004 Premier Cru. So suppose A and B agree on the *extension of the class* with respect to which they are judging; i.e. the kind of wine by reference to which they should be comparing Mortet's 2004 Gevrey Chambertin: e.g. as a Cote de Nuits village wine from 2004. The comparison class serves an analogous role to the frame of reference in the case of judgements of movement. Disagreement would be possible *only if* the same comparison class was in play. The relevant comparison class with respect to which their judgements should be made would be left implicit by their talk, but the context of their discussion would settle which was the relevant comparison class, just as in the spatial case the relevant frame of reference is left implicit but is often fixed by context.

In the dispute we are have just been considering, how might both parties appeal to the same comparison class, disagree over a given instance, and yet both entitled to their verdicts? One option is that while both parties agree on the extension of the comparison class, they *conceive* the class differently. This would leave room for disagreement

¹⁶ The application of this semantic option to debates about relativism was first tried, to the best of my knowledge, by Mark Richard in his 'Contextualism and Relativism' in *Philosophical Studies* 2004.

because they could use different standards for sorting items in the class, or apply the same standard rather differently within the same class.

How would this work? Let us suppose that A and B take as the comparative class for the wine they are assessing 2004 Cote de Nuits village wines. Nevertheless, A could think this was a delicious for 2004 red village wines from the Cote de Nuits because from all the samples of the class he has tasted so far, this is the most pleasurable. B may not have sampled many, or any, wines from this range, but could assess the current sample negatively by reference to how he thinks wines from that class *should* taste. They may even have different views about the overall strengths of the comparison class. A could think what is in his glass is a pretty good sample from a pretty poor year, while B may think that the 2004 vintage was *classique* and *typique* and that the wine he samples should be expressing more of the *terroir* and vintage characteristics than it actually does. The key difference is that while A may be judging statistically – better than average —B could be judging normatively – in terms of how things of that class should be.¹⁷ Does this constitute a crucial difference between the content of what A is asserting and B is denying? It is not clear that it does. And yet both opposing judgements could be said to be correct. However, we have still not made out a case for relativism since each party could acknowledge that the other's verdict was correct with respect to their way of measuring the sample against items in the comparison class. No incompatibility would remain and the disagreement would dissolve.

Another source of disagreement may be due to the different experiences each person has of 2004 red Cote de Nuits village wines.. A has sampled few wines and found them to be of poor quality being dilute and acidic. He tastes the Denis Mortet Gevrey Chambertin and believes that this is much finer than anything else he has tasted within the comparison class. Believing that this is as good as it gets and that nothing else he tastes will better it, he judges this to be delicious for a wine of this category; i.e. that this wine is better than wines typical of this class. B on the other hand may have sampled few

¹⁷ I owe the distinction between applying standards statistically or normatively within a comparison class to Delia Graff Fara.

wines and yet having tasted at least two wines finer than the one he now samples, he judges this wine to be less appealing or delicious than the typical wines in this class. Here, there may be a fact of the matter that is overlooked by both A and B without it being the case that the facts about what it is right to say will always outstrip their ability to judge. Having limited experience of the comparison class but forming opinions about how the rest of the class will turn out on that basis makes sense of their disagreement about a particular example while leaving room for a resolution in favour of one or the other with respect to a full sampling of wines from the relevant comparison class.

For relativism to enter the picture in the face of disagreement, there must be a case where, A and B understand the semantics of the gradable adjective in the same way – i.e. both believing that for ‘delicious’ to apply to a wine from an agreed comparison class C should be a matter of whether this wine ranks highly with respect to items in C – but disagree on the application of the adjective in the given case. That is, there must be room to disagree about whether the example is, or should be, so highly ranked. By not understanding each other’s way of applying a standard within the comparative class there is scope for disagreement. However, both parties could be warranted given their own way of assessing or applying standards within that class.¹⁸ The question of whether this is a form of relativism shifts to whether there is an irresolvable disagreement about how to apply a standard. If each recognizes the accuracy of the other’s way of judging but simply does not adopt that way of judging himself, there is no case for relativism. If however they continue to disagree about this sample when they both know how the other is applying the standard there may be a case for relativism about what it is to apply a standard in the right way. Though if disagreement did persist we may wonder whether they are adopting subtly different standards. Why shouldn’t the disputants assume that

¹⁸ A similar diagnosis could be given for Crispin Wright’s example of a surgeon who says, ‘The scalpel is dangerously blunt’ while the assistant handing it to someone to clean says, ‘Watch out, the scalpel is dangerously sharp’. Each means the same by ‘blunt’ and ‘sharp’, and each has the same comparison class of surgical scalpels in mind. The notion of sharp for a scalpel may vary according to the shifting standards, or application of a standard within the given class. See Wright 2006, p.53.

their interlocutor is operating with different standards? Let us leave such questions open at this stage. I shall return to them once we have considered more cases.

As we have just seen, the way in which people disagree may be less to do with having the same or a different propositional content to assess and more to do with divergence about how they appeal to a comparative class, or make judgements with respect to that class. Appeals to comparative classes in the use of gradable adjectives may increase the chances of disputing parties coming to have compatible judgements because the means of ranking within the class may remain the only room for variation once other differences are expressed or resolved. And it may be that when the appeals each side makes to the comparison class are spelled out and followed through the parties may come to converge in their verdicts about the same wines. The remaining question is whether the sorts of appeals to standards each side makes when comparing exemplars within a class can lead to incompatible judgements when all the facts are in. If so, the prospects for relativism look promising.

9. Is Relativism about Taste Intelligible?

The relativist option was put to one side earlier because we had difficulties making sense of the idea of two people talking about the same thing, disagreeing, and both saying something true. If both parties are right when they say what is delicious, what is funny, or what is good, how can they really be genuinely disagreeing? If one is right, surely the other must be wrong. How can it be intelligible to say they are both right?

To get a fix on the details and the possibilities here, let us look at some actual cases:

- (i) one concerning a pair of wine critics,
- (ii) the other concerning different populations of tasters.

This idea that nothing is factually overlooked but that irreconcilable differences remain over what it is correct to say can quickly descend into subjectivism about what is at stake

here. Once all the facts are in, isn't each side's view of things answerable to nothing more than their own opinion about how different things compare? If so, where is the objectivity they aim for in their respective judgements? Can we do better?

Remember, that in claiming that a wine is delicious or excellent, one is aspiring to make a claim with some degree of objectivity. Otherwise, one might as well retreat to, 'I don't know what everyone else thinks, but I think this is delicious'. And this is certainly not the situation when wine critics compare bottles from particular vintages or regions. The attempt to make an objective claim requires one to fix a standard that provides conditions a wine has to meet to be assessed accurately as delicious. But what establishes the relevant standard? If disputes of the sort we are considering merely amount to assertions that one be entitled to fix one's own standard, or say which standard should be accepted, this is no longer a troubling dispute. Instead, one holds one's claim to be open to challenge or confirmation by others – one takes oneself to be subjectively taking in what is objectively the case for creatures like us — and one expects (some) others to be capable of recognizing how things are. In a sense, one is laying claim to (certain) others' endorsement of the judgement made.¹⁹ Yet, the mere fact of disagreement ought to make one question the wider applicability of one's claim and the right to invoke others in making such a judgement. Why should one cling to the idea that everyone is required to come to the same verdict in the face of so much evidence to the contrary? It seems to depend on who is disagreeing with us and how strong their grounds for disagreement are thought to be. When challenged by someone one recognizes as a good judge it may give one pause and require one to think again. But others will be recognized as poor judges and not well placed to make an accurate assessment. Should we all be ready to discount the testimony of our senses and defer when confronted with an expert's opinion? Less easy to see that we would be willing to do so in the case of taste. Besides, one may begin to exercise enough judgement to count as an expert oneself. So what are we to say when seasoned critics disagree with one another. Who is to serve as arbiter in that case? Let us

¹⁹ For a discussion of this idea that appeals to but ultimately rejects Kant's doctrine about aesthetic judgements as universalizable claims see Smith 2005.

consider a real case: : the dispute between wine critics Robert Parker and Jancis Robinson about the 2003 Chateau Pavie from St Emilion.

Robert Parker and Jancis Robinson regularly assess young Bordeaux wines and rank them for quality. Their judgements usually converge, though famously they had a fierce disagreement over the 2003 Chateau Pavie. Here it may be clear that there are standards each critic is adhering to, but it may not be so clear which standard is operative in their respective judgements, or even which comparison class is involved, or even how the comparison classes invoked are being appealed to. Consider the 2003 Chateau Pavie. The respective judgements by Parker and Robinson about this right bank Bordeaux wine were as follows:

RP: (8) 2003 Ch.Pavie is an excellent Bordeaux.

JR: (9) 2003 Ch.Pavie is not an excellent Bordeaux.

We could analyse (8) as:

(8') It is excellent for a wine *and* it is a Bordeaux wine

Or we could analyse it as:

(8'') It is excellent *for* a Bordeaux wine

Whereas, we could analyse (9) as:

(9') It is not an excellent wine in the category of Bordeaux wines

Or

(9'') It is not an excellent wine and it is a Bordeaux wine

Readings (8') and (9') are, I think, closest to the understanding each of them had of their own judgements. We could analyse further:

(10) This is excellent in the class of wines made in Bordeaux in 2003.

Or:

(10') This is excellent given what a wine from Bordeaux ought to taste like

It may be that Ch. Pavie could be considered as in (10) good in purely a statistical rating of the wines from Bordeaux that year but not good normatively as in (10'). Robinson seems to have judged the wine to have failed the normative condition (10'), saying it was not like a Bordeaux but more like a zinfandel. (A very bad thing for a Bordeaux wine.)

We could analyse the first conjunct of (8') as depending on the claim:

(11) Wines should be judged by some absolute standard.

Does this mean some Platonic standard? No, there may be no such thing. But relative to some larger class such as red wines, or cabernet based wines, or Bordeaux blends, this may be judged an excellent wine, though atypical for Bordeaux. This would make the standard other than that of (10) or (10'). Is it the view of Robert Parker that all wines, including Bordeaux wines, ought to aspire to the same standard operating in the largest possible class? Not obviously. Parker knows and admires many Bordeaux wines not of the style of other Cabernets. But when a sample wine stands out as atypical he may switch to another standard for assessment: one for which he has a penchant, namely, his famous the across the board 100 point scale, which purports to give him the means to compare any wine with any other. Robinson, on the other hand, may still look for wines within category and when they stand out will not switch; or if she does, will judge by a wider standard on which such powerful, rich and alcoholic wines are still not favoured.²⁰

²⁰ Interestingly, both critics use similar descriptors for the wine, regarding it as rich, alcoholic, extracted, viscous, with sweet and jammy fruit flavours, and lots of polished oak. They disagree over whether this is admirable.

Different frames of reference for sorting and for evaluating wines seem to underlie the judgements of our two critics in (8) and (9). Parker deems some Bordeaux wines to come high within the class of all wines, or red wines, or wines that are exceptional. But the larger category is indexed to his own personal standard of taste. By contrast, the wines in the classes of Bordeaux, California, Bugundy, etc. are very clearly separated for Robinson. So whereas Parker can judge a wine as exceptional – relative to his standard of taste – and as a Bordeaux, Robinson can only regard excellence in a wine as a matter of coming top of *its* class; i.e highly ranked as a Bordeaux. Thereafter, comparatives will be due to personal preference but these may not be fixed. They may vary from occasion to occasion depending on features of context or other factors.

Do our critics disagree on personal taste? Do they disagree at all? Are they making different claims? It's complicated to say.

- (i) They disagree about whether ChPavie2003 is an excellent wine.
- (ii) It is an excellent wine for RP because it is excellent in the larger category of red cabernet sauvignon/merlot blends.
- (iii) It is not excellent for JR because it ought to be excellent within its category, of being a Bordeaux wine.
- (iv) JR may rate it reasonably well were it in a comparative rating with Zinfandels
- (v) They disagree not over personal taste but over which standard to apply in judging excellence. JR has no such category as all cabernet sauvignon reds, but if she did personal preference would probably militate against judging this excellent.
- (vi) If RP were right about the applicable standard for comparison would Ch. Pavie be excellent? Not necessarily. Since the issue of his personal preference would seem to be operating here. Though he may be right.
- (vii) If JR were right about the standard then she may well be right to deny that this is an excellent wine since judging within category is hard without norms.
- (viii) The way JR organises her categories and their standards lead her to draw conclusions quite differently from RP.

- (ix) There is no standpoint from which to judge who is right. Residual relativism enters here.
- (x) Though it is not just a matter of personal taste.
- (xi) We switch categories for convenience, to make appropriate judgements, because one seems more appropriate at one time than another.
- (xii) Judging the best wine for an occasion, for the food, for the temperature, for the mood, for another, etc. This may mean looking for a simpler wine. Not as much complexity, finesse or elegance, but one which is a better bet for a summer's day, or for the charcuterie, or for lunchtime. The *best* wine is therefore relative in this sense too. It needs a frame of reference.
- (xiii) By his 100 point scale RP is aspiring to have first equals across all wines. JR may insist on wines coming top of their categories, and so come to similar verdicts for different reasons. But she may insist the tops of each category cannot be compared, not even to be roughly equated as considerable drinking experiences. It depends on further judgements, as to what one is looking for, why one is choosing a bottle, and for what occasion.

People may say 'This wine is delicious' for different reasons. And we may be tempted to say they mean something different by their claims. But why should that be the right response either in that case, or where there is *prima facie* disagreement? And remember if there cannot be disagreement, there cannot be agreement either.²¹ Agreement must be accounted for too, and if we too quickly conclude that people who have *prima facie* disagreements must mean different things by their claims, then we may have to conclude that even in cases where they do not disagree, they do not express agreement either.

People may find themselves agreeing for different reasons. Both say the wine is balanced. Both say the leaves are green, (in Travis-like cases). They can both agree the sentence

²¹ Agreement and disagreement are not entirely symmetrical as is brought out well by the very striking case of overlapping judgements of tall by two judges operating with different standards. This nicely described case is due to Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne in their 2009 book.

uttered is true but for different reasons. Should this lead us to conclude they mean something different by what they say?

Consider a case where RP and JR both agree.

(12) This is an excellent Bordeaux.

But RP agrees because it is good in a class of wines and is a Bordeaux, and JR agrees because it is good in its class. Here we have agreement for different reasons and by reference to different criteria so it cannot straightforwardly be concluded that the same judgement is being made by JR and RP. Do they agree? Surely, there is *a sense* in which they do and another sense in which they don't. Whatever lessons can be learned and whatever there is to capture here may be applied in the analogous case of disagreement. More worrying seems to be the case where two people are both right and yet accept different verdicts. Yet, in the agreement case, people may be unable to accept the same verdict despite accepting or assenting to the same statement on the same occasion. The case of agreement has an easy resolution and may also give some clues to disagreement but can it cover all the cases?

We can see (12) as being analysed along the lines of:

(12a) This is excellent for a wine and it is a Bordeaux

(12b) This is excellent within the class of Bordeaux wines

(12c) This is excellent for a Bordeaux wine,

(12d) This is excellent given how Bordeaux wines ought to be.

If one critic is reading (12) according to (12a) and the other according to (12b) or (12c) then they may not be adhering to the same judgement at all, unless there is sufficiently great overlap in what makes any of these statements true for us to say that they make the less demanding claim (12) true. After all, the statement in (12) does not make explicit what is being asserting and it may tolerate *all* these readings and hence all of these ways of making it true. And so long as there are at least three or four ways of making (12) true,

any of them may count, and so each of the speakers will be saying something true but thinking of that truth in a different way, in terms of what, for each of them, makes that claim true. There will be more than one way for (12) to be made true and speakers will often selectively attend to, or focus on, just one way of making that sentence true and imagine or hear the sentence, when uttered by others, as saying what they take it to mean: i.e. (12a) or (12d). That means that we could accept RP and JR as agreeing to the truth of (12) even though they have different reasons for thinking or accepting it as true.

What about disagreement? Can we make similar moves? We could try saying that when RP accepts (8) and JR denies it, they are disagreeing about different ways in which (8) could be true and so there is room for them to be both right and wrong. RP is right if he is judging it along the lines analogous to (12a). And whether he is right or wrong after that may depend on whether he is right or wrong in exercising his personal preferences. This may be hard to determine. But JR may be denying (8) in a way analogous to (12c) or (12d) or denying (12b) because she denies (12c) or (12d). This would make her say that (8) was false because it wasn't true in the way she thought (8) ought to be evaluated, indeed, according to what *she* took (8) to be saying. But this is not the only way of (8) being true and so she cannot rule it out on other grounds. She could say something explicitly like (12d) and then she may be right, depending on how we evaluate normative statements like this for truth. But she is disputing (8) and there it simply doesn't follow that (8) is false, if it is not true on the grounds she *thinks* would make it true. It could still be true for other reasons, but whether those other reasons are valid depends on a view about whether such standards or categories are valid and this is a larger dispute.

JR and RP disagree about the relevant comparative class: not Bordeaux but all red cabernet based wines. Or they disagree about how to judge within the comparative class: best example of a wine — any wine — in a ranking of better or worse wines restricted to that class; or some normative standard by reference to which samples in that class are compared. Alternatively, they may even disagree about there being a single invariant standard within any comparative class, accepting instead that there will be different verdicts for which is the best in a class on different occasions, or in relations to different

people, foods, etc. An inspired judgement will often alight on features others recognize as entirely apt. We may judge in favour of lighter reds, more minerally Bordeaux on one occasion and not another. A Rhone for some occasions may be best, and a Loire for another. The choice would be best because of, or relative to some further factor X.

In the end, do any of these analyses offer a form of relativism? Perhaps. When we switch standards or norms, or weigh them differently, we may get different verdicts on the truth-value of the same statement — a statement made with the help of a gradable adjective. The same statement, making the same claim, would be true relative to one criterion of assessment but false relative to another. The disagreements are about the same claim and the grounds for disagreement are not contained in the original statement, they belong to issues in the background, but unlike frames of reference in spatial judgements, there is no shift in comparison class. Does this mean that parties making appeal to different means of assessing are talking about different things, as in the spatial case? No. They are just seeing the same thing differently: like seeing the same thing from different perspectives. Mark Richard puts the point well when he says:

Suppose that I assertively utter ‘Mary is rich’, when it is not Antecedently settled for conversational purposes whether Mary is in the term’s extension. My statement, that Mary is rich, is as much an invitation to look at things in a certain way, as it is a representation of how things are. In saying that Mary is rich, I am inviting you to think of being rich in such a way that Mary counts as rich. If you accept my invitation – that is, if you don’t demur, and carry on the conversation – that sets the standards for wealth, for the purposes of the conversation, so as to make what I say true. (Richard 2004, 226)

10. Separating the Descriptive and Evaluative?

A further option is analyzing the notion of seeing the same facts differently is to try separating out the descriptive and evaluative components. After all, Robert Parker and Jancis Robinson agree, near enough, in their descriptions of the qualities and characteristics of the taste of 2003 Ch Pavie, but while Parker rates those qualities highly (in any wine), Robinson does not.

We could adopt a Humean view of the different components here by pointing to Hume's distinction between what he called 'sensory impressions' had in response to a perceptible substance and 'impressions of reflection' that immediately accompany them, and express our approbation or aversion. The latter evaluative component follows so swiftly as to be nearly confused with the former. However if we separate impressions of sensation and reflection we could say that tastes are objectively characterisable by expert tasters but their evaluative talk is nonfactual. So while there are facts about what the 2003 Ch. Pavie tastes like there are no fact of the matter about its quality. This could be an expressivist line on evaluative talk such as 'good' or 'excellent'. Alternatively, realism could re-enter, with the evaluative part being settled by something beyond our ken. Either way, the threat of relativism recedes.

However, we must now consider another real case of tasting judgements where it is hard to separate out the evaluative and non-evaluative components. The case is documented by Chollet and Valentin (2000) and concerns respective sweetness/saltiness judgements by a group of Australian and Japanese subjects.

With respect to the same food samples they were asked to judge whether the sample tasted salty, sweet, or just right. The results were a crossing over of verdicts on sweet and salty by Japanese and Australians. What Australians found salty the Japanese found just right, and what the Japanese found sweet the Australins thought just right. Take O and J as subjects. We get the following pattern of verdicts.

(O) Sample 1 is salty.

(J) Sample 1 is just right.

(J) Sample 2 is too sweet.

(O) Sample 2 is just right.

The important thing to note for our purposes is that one can't parse the adjective 'salty' into descriptive and evaluative components. Whether something counts as 'salty' can't be

a matter of the absolute level of salt compounds found in the substance. ‘Salty’ is a taste predicate, not a chemical descriptor, and taste properties does not correlate in any precise way with chemical compounds. Can tastes can still be objective properties involving subjects and their responses? I think they can. And yet, for the same substance we have the utterance by O:

(13) Sample 1 is salty

Is the utterance true or false? O will judge it true, while J will judge it false. Who is right? Is Sample 1 salty? According to O, yes; according to J, no. Is there just no fact of the matter? That’s too quick.

To save the claim about the objectivity of tastes we need a Relativist treatment of the application of the predicate. Why? Well, Pluralism won’t do: something can’t be both salty and not salty. Rather, the facts are assessor relative. It is simply an Absolutist prejudice to suppose that the sample must be either salty or not salty absolutely.

The relativist option was put in doubt because we could not see how two people could be talking about the same thing, come up with a different view of it and both be right. If both parties are right when they say whether something is salty, how can they be genuinely disagreeing? Surely what one person says rules out what the other one says. So if one person is right, the other has to be wrong. But this is precisely what relativism seems to deny in claiming that both parties can be right. So if relativism *is* the claim that both parties to a dispute are right there appears to be no way to save the incompatibility of their claims: i.e. if one is right, the other is wrong. And if there is no incompatibility there is no dispute of the sort that invites a relativist solution.²² Relativism seems to require both genuine disagreement between parties to a dispute and a way of regarding both parties as saying something true. But doesn’t one speaker’s being right entail that the other is wrong, if they are disputing the very same claim? The problem of formulation

²² As Bernard Williams one put it, adopting relativism appears to make the very problem relativism was designed to solve disappear.

here should make us suspicious that relativism should be expressed as the view that parties to an intractable dispute can both be right. In fact, to say both are right is utterly misleading, and assumes a perspective from which we can neutrally observe both points of view. But this is just what the relativist denies.

11. A Better Formulation of Relativism?

Progress can be made and we can get some purchase on the idea of genuine disagreement of the sort the relativist should espouse if we follow John MacFarlane's suggestion of making the notion of incompatibility of claims itself perspectival. MacFarlane proposed that we must evaluate assertions made by a speaker (in uttering a sentence at a context of utterance) by reference to not just a circumstance of evaluation (the relevant worldly facts) but also a context of assessment. This may be the context of assessment of the speaker or hearer or some third party. On this view, facts are assessor-relative, and the incompatibility of their claims must be judged from a perspective: incompatibility is a perspective-relative notion.

The claims made by A and B cannot both be accurate from the same perspective, or when assessed relative to the same context of assessment. From each person's perspective (even that of a third party) only one of A or B can be right and the other must be wrong. But notice this does not mean that either one or other is *absolutely* right. A and B will assess each other's claims from their own perspectives and take opposing stands on who is speaking truly and who is speaking falsely. Each accepts that they cannot both be right, but who is right and who is wrong differs from one perspective to another, or from one context of assessment to the next. Each can speak truly *from where he or she stands*. Relativism is the claim that there is only truth from a context of assessment (which may be the same as the context of utterance, though not necessarily.)

Contexts of assessment are *not* just further parameters with respect to which we evaluate a claim, along with, e.g. worlds and times by treating contexts of assessment as if they functioned like contexts of utterance. E.g.

S at C is true at a $\langle w_c, t_c, s_c \rangle$ iff the proposition expressed by S in C is true at the world, time and standard of taste of the context of utterance

moves to:

S at C is true at a $\langle w, t, s \rangle$ iff the proposition expressed by S in C is true at world w, time t, and standard of taste s of the assessor

Worlds and times shift the context of evaluation but the context of assessment provides a different perspective or way of evaluating a claim with respect to the *same* circumstances of evaluation.

So what of disagreement? Is A's judgement incompatible with B's? We can cast their disagreement in the way MacFarlane suggests by evaluating the claim each makes relative to a context of assessment. In each context, their claims will be incompatible, but the incompatibility of their claims will not be fixed in one determinate way. We must assess the incompatibility of a pair of claims *relative to a perspective*:

Perspectival Incompatibilism:

An assertion of a claim that p at a context C is accurate iff p is true at W_c & S_c , where W_c is the world of the context C and S_c is the standard of the speaker at C.

This would make it the case that a speaker/population of tasters says something accurate about a wine just in case it is true given the standard of taste of the speaker/population of tasters subscribed to within the comparative class explicitly or implicitly appealed to in the context (not of utterance but) of assessment. At any context A and B can't both be accurate. What a speaker says about a wine is accurate just in case it is true given the standard of taste of the speaker, or relative to the application of the standard the speaker invokes within the comparative class implicitly appealed to in the context. The objectivity of perceptually accessible tastes is assured and is compatible with (requires)

relativism. Relativism and objectivity can be combined (see. Bernard Williams on ethical judgements). There is something it is right for members of the population of tasters to say, and they can get it wrong with respect to that population or their own best judgements.

But do we really have the kind of disagreement that is intractable? Yes, if due to training, experience, etc. members of one population cannot access the other's perspective and some cannot recognize their judgements as true, we may have relativism about truth. However, if one's judgement is open to revision, and can always be revised on the basis of experience, with one's own later judgement or another's more discriminating one forcing a revision until we can occupy the other's perspective, this will not be relativism and the disputes will not be intractable. The perspectives in question must be entrenched. However, the inability to either the other's perspective or find the reasons for their judgement leave the option of subjectivism in the differences between individuals or communities as a live option.

12. Relativism and Rule-Following

The question all along has been whether the sorts of appeals to standards each side can make when judging cases, even within a class, can lead to incompatible judgements when all the facts are in. Are there such irreconcilable judgements? The idea that nothing is factually overlooked but that irreconcilable differences remain over what it is correct to say is what threatens to descend into subjectivism about there being no fact of the matter in such disputes. Isn't each side's view answerable to nothing more than their own opinion about how things should be compared? If so, where is the objectivity they aim for in their respective judgements?

Can a better case be made out? *Perhaps it can.* Consider a case where two critics have hitherto coincided in all their judgements of taste, have offered the same reason for doing so, and assumed they are using the same standard, but on presentation of a new case they

diverge in their judgements. Each claims to be continuing to apply the same standard they have previously applied hitherto. Each sees the other as departing from that standard. How should we describe the case? The following options are open to us:

- (a) Divergence shows that they were not following the same standard up till now
- (b) Divergence shows one has departed from the standard previously in play
- (c) Divergence show both are operating with a new standard
- (d) Both are continuing to judge in the same way: both continuations count as legitimate extensions of that standard. Both make legitimate but incompatible judgements.

Here, there is a close parallel between the issue of relativism and the rule-following considerations. This should be no surprise since we are talking about judging in accordance with a standard (of taste). Going on in the same way in applying that standard may be open at the point where we experience a new and surprising exemplar in a given class. With a *stand-out* case to consider what may be required at this point is, as Wittgenstein says, a decision not a judgement. Think of judging a new architectural or new musical style, or a new fashion or a controversial art work. Whether we decide to include it in the list of aesthetic or fashionable objects, or whether we decide to embrace atonal music as music sets out one's stall on continuities or otherwise with past assessments. Critics are frequently asked to make a judgement call about a new fashion, new musical style, rare taste. We feel that we try to 'get it right', we even revise our decisions in the light of others' persuasive remarks. Each is an invitation to see it one way and not another. What we decide settles the matter and extends the standard to this case, or excludes it.

Each party asserts that he is applying the existing standard to the new stand-out case by either including it, or rejecting it. Each thinks the other mistaken in failing to apply the standard (of taste) they both aim to adhere to, and that only one is right as to whether the standard can be extended to this new case or not. It is assessor relative whether the standard does encompass this new case. For each it is a matter of decision that sets up the

relevant context of assesment. ²³ Notice that these decisions are not arbitrary. There are better and worse decisions. Consider decisions by Supreme Court or Law Lords. Plus our initial decisions could be revised in the light of further reflection.

The question of interest for relativism is whether there two equally legitimate ways to extend the standard? But notice this is the wrong way to put the question, as we saw above. We can't and shouldn't put things this way since we can only have an assessor relative view of the matter. We can't claim, in absolutist terms, that both ways of going on constitute extending the standard. To say this is not to appreciate or understand the pull of the standard, and is thus to rob it of its objective credentials. But just as in the rule-following case, we can ask whether anything, other than judgement, settles what counts as extending the rile to a new case. There may be no judgements-independent fact, but each judgement, when made in accordance with some conditions for ideal judgement count as legitimating the extension of the same standard.. Though, from any context of assesment only one way of extending to the new case counts as adhering to the operative standard. The other way counts as departing from it. This is relativism and it is linked to delicate issues of objectivity and rule-following. I suggest that further investigation of the possibilities sketched here may ipen up the most fruitful avenue for the relativism about taste to pursue.

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²³ Why not see all cases, 'tall', 'red' in the same way, and adopt relatvism throughout? I think this is not warranted and that different considerations are brought to bear in the cases under discussion. Space prevents me from offering more, save to say that we should look at matters case by case.

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