

The Makings of Truth
Realism, Response-Dependence, and Relativism

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Family Guy is funny. Roquefort cheese is tasty. Brad Pitt is sexy. iPhones are cool.

Many of us think that these are all true. As much true, in fact, as that Family Guy is much more popular now that it used to, that Roquefort cheese must be made in Roquefort, that Brad Pitt said he won't marry Angelina Jolie until same-sex couples are allowed to get married, and that iPhones 3GS are still practically unavailable in Barcelona stores.

As the recent literature on contextualism and relativism has illustrated, however, cases like the former seem to allow for the possibility that someone forms a contrasting judgment without error on part of either them or us. If one conceives of relativism in general as the attempt to endorse such appearances of faultless disagreement, relativism about the funny, the tasty, the sexy, and the cool, constitutes certainly a very attractive position. And such relativism is arguably precisely what marks the rejection of realism about these things. So, it seems, one can think there are truths about what is funny, tasty, sexy, or cool, without being realist about these things. How can this be so?

Following the lead of Crispin Wright (1992), some hold that this being so requires that 'true' does not signify one very same property across realism-supporting and relativism-vindicating discourses. Or, if it does, that the property be somehow functional, realized by properties of different kinds in the various domains. In this paper I want to explore an alternative to this view, which locates the mark between realism and relativism in the kinds of properties involved *in the truthmakers* for the various truths, compatibly with *truth* being uniformly the traditional "correspondentist" type of property, broadly conceived. In a nutshell, provided relativism about them is sensible, there are truthmakers for truths about the funny, the tasty, the sexy, and the cool that involve *response-dependent properties*.

This paper is in five sections. In the first one, I summarize some views on truthmaking I will be presupposing, emphasizing however the various controversies on which I will remain neutral. In section two and three, I present the characterization of a response-dependent property. In section four, I present two ways in which a property can be response-dependent, in the characterized sense. In final section five, I present how these correspond to different versions of *moderate* relativism, namely indexical and non-indexical contextualism. Thus the view presented here contrasts not only with pluralism about truth, but also with radical relativism about truth, as recently defended by John MacFarlane.

1. Truthmakers

According to a standard view about truthmaking, a *truthmaker* for a given truth is something in virtue of which the truth is true. (See Armstrong (2004).)

Many philosophers hold that something along these lines constitutes the basic insight behind traditional conceptions of truth as correspondence to reality: truths are about things, are grounded in reality, they do not float free in a void, in David Lewis' apt phrase. So, some argue, the state of affairs of this rose's being red, or the trope that is the particular redness of this rose, is that which makes true that the rose is red. Similarly, the truth that Socrates is human is grounded in the parcel of reality constituted by the state of affairs of Socrates' being human, or the trope that is the particular humanity of Socrates. There might be less that correspondence, in that one particular truth might have more than one truthmaker, such as the truth that there is a human in the building can be made true by various entities involving the different humans in the building; and one particular entity can make true more than one truth, such as the truthmaker for the truth that Socrates is human making also true that somebody is human.

Some of the recent and ongoing debates about truthmakers concern the extent of truthmaking, that is, whether the claim that truths require truthmakers can be somehow weakened, allowing that some sorts of truths lack truthmakers, while preserving the basic insight that truth be grounded in reality. Thus some claim that only *contingent* truths, such as the truth that the rose is red, require truthmakers, whereas necessary truths, such as the truth that two plus two equals four, do not. Even within the class of contingent truths, *negative existentials*, such as the truth that there are no unicorns, have proven particularly controversial: do they require a peculiar sort of "negative" or "totalizing" truthmaker or are (combinations of) ordinary "positive" truthmakers capable of making them true? Or is the insight preserved by the contention that truths require the presence of the truthmaker *or the lack of a falsemaker*—something that would make true the negation of the truth, in the example, the existence of a unicorn?

Some others of the recent and ongoing debates about truthmakers concern the nature of truthmakers, of truthbearers, and of the relation of truthmaking. Are truthmakers for truths such as that the rose is red *state of affairs*, the rose's being red, or *tropes*, the particular redness of the rose? Can *objects* themselves, the rose, make some truths true, such as the truth that the rose exists? As to truthbearers, some hold that primary they are things like *sentences in context*, whereas others favor the *contents* of speech acts and/or psychological attitudes (or "propositions", according to some, but not, all usages). The relation of truthmaking holds between a truthmaker and a truth if the truthmaker is that in virtue of which the truth is true. Is this *in virtue of* fundamental, or it allows for reduction in more basic terms? Even if not reducible, maybe it has consequences involving other relations, for instance modal or explanatory. Some hold that if something makes a truth true then it necessitates the truth. Some hold that if something makes a truth true then the truth is true because of that thing, or of its existence. And which principles does truthmaking obey? According to the *entailment principle*, if something makes a truth true, then it also makes true of all the truths this truth entails. According to the *disjunction thesis*, if something makes a disjunctive truth true, then it makes true some of the truth's disjuncts. According to the *conjunction thesis*, if something makes a conjunctive truth true, then it makes true each of the truth's conjuncts. All these are principles have been defended and opposed in the recent literature.

Important as of all these issues are for a full-fledged Truthmaker Theory, I think I can remain neutral on them here. There are two assumptions I will make, however. First, as implicit above, that truthmakers, at least for truths such as those that will concern us here, involve, in one way or another, *properties*. I will not assume any particular view on the nature on properties, in terms of universals, tropes, or classes of objects. I will not assume that the properties involved in the truthmakers are fundamental, maybe they supervene on more basic entities. Second, and relatedly, that truthmakers need not be *minimal* or *ultimate* truthmakers. A minimal truthmaker for a truth is a truthmaker for that truth such that no (proper) part or constituent of it would also be a truthmaker for it. An ultimate truthmaker for a truth is a truthmaker for that truth involving fundamental entities, which do not supervene on more basic ones.

2. *Response-Dependence*

The proposal to be explored here is that truths about the funny, the tasty, the sexy, and the cool, have (perhaps non-minimal, non-ultimate) truthmakers that involve *response-dependent properties*. What is a response-dependent property?

The phrase ‘response-dependence’ appeared in the literature for the first time twenty years ago in Mark Johnston’s ‘Dispositional Theories of Value’ (1989).

Some philosophers, including McDowell and Wiggins, had attempted to defend a view about the metaphysics of value against those who claim that value is not a genuine feature of certain things by analogy with secondary qualities, and color in particular.

Consider a view according to which (say) redness is the disposition to produce in (say) perceptually normal humans an experience as of red in normal viewing conditions. Now predications of a predicate signifying it, ‘is red,’ would be clearly, vagueness aside, truth-evaluable, and some of them true. Further, something could be red independently of the subjects actually eliciting the responses (if for instance the conditions are not the normal viewing ones) and, to the extent that we consider the relevant subjects, responses and conditions as they *actually* are, even independently of what the relevant subjects might be like or whether they exist at all. It seems that if values were analogous to colors, at least so conceived, then certain anti-realist positions concerning the evaluative could be rejected. Something like this line of argument is what, according to Johnston, the “analogists” pursue. As he puts it, “the leading idea of the analogist has been to show that by the same standards of genuineness it would follow that color is not a genuine feature of surfaces.” (Johnston, 1989: 139).

There are obvious and less obvious disanalogies between colors and values, but these, according to Johnston, do not preclude there being a further analogy capable of doing the work the analogists wanted it to:

The most plausible, if highly generalizing, way of taking the analogy is this: evaluational concepts, like secondary quality concepts as understood by the analogists, are ‘response-dependent’ concepts. (Johnston, 1989: 144)

His original characterization of the notion of a response-dependent *concept* was:

How then are we to demarcate the response-dependent concepts?

If C, the concept associated with a predicate ‘is C’, is a concept interdependent with or dependent upon

concepts of certain subjects' responses under certain conditions then something of the following form will hold a priori

x is C iff In K , S s are disposed to produce x -directed response R

(or

x is such as to produce R in S s under conditions K)]

... [W]hen for a given C we have substantial or non-trivializing specifications of K , R , and the S s, and the resultant biconditional holds a priori, then we have a concept interdependent with or dependent upon a concept of subject's reactions under specified conditions. Such will be a response-dependent concept. (Johnston, 1989: 145–146)

It is worth noting right now two *prima facie* contrasting features. The first is that the project for which the notion of response-dependence is introduced is straightforwardly *metaphysical*: to provide a way of explicating the (possible) analogy between values and secondary qualities, thus explicating how to hold

both that the discourse in question serves up genuine candidates for truth and falsity, and that, nonetheless, the subject matter which makes statements true or false is not wholly independent of the cognitive or affective responses of the speakers in the discourse. (Johnston, 1989: 144)

The second is that, this notwithstanding, 'response-dependent' as used here by Johnston qualifies *concepts* for properties like secondary qualities and values, and not those very *properties* themselves. As will be apparent in a moment, I have been convinced by the argument presented below that this is more than a *prima facie* contrast, and thus that his original characterization of response-dependence should be modified if his original project for it is to be pursued. But before going on to this, let me rephrase the proposal slightly, in a way that will be useful for the discussion to come.

Let me say then that if F is a (predicative) concept, a *response-dependence-giving* (or *rd*, for short) biconditional for F is a substantial biconditional of the form:

Something is F iff it has the disposition to produce in subjects S the mental response R under conditions C

or the form

Something is F iff subjects S have the disposition to issue the mental response R directed to it under conditions C

where 'is F ' is a predicate expressing F , and 'substantial' is there to avoid "whatever-it-takes" specifications of either S , R or C . (One such "whatever-it-takes" specification of, say, subjects S would be "those subjects, however they be, such that something is disposed to produce in them responses R under conditions C iff it is F ." *Mutatis mutandis* for the responses and the conditions.)

Now,

(RD₀) A (predicative) concept is response-dependent iff there is a response-dependence-giving biconditional for it which holds *a priori*.

It is clear that without the previous requirement on substantiality, all concepts would turn out trivially to be response-dependent. For take any predicative concept F , and some arbitrary (substantial) specifications of mental responses, R , and conditions, C . Then the following would be a *rd* biconditional for F , which clearly holds *a priori*:

Something is F iff it has the disposition to produce in those subjects, however they be, such that something is disposed to produce in them responses R under conditions C iff it is F, the mental response R under conditions C.

It is important to notice, however, that given that if a concept is to be response-dependent there should be a rd biconditional *which holds a priori*, the relevant specifications would be in those cases substantial but nonetheless accessible to the possessors of the concept in question. This does not mean that they should be such as to make the relevant biconditional *obviously a priori* (not even obviously *true*): with all probability, they won't. But they couldn't be such as to be understood only as a result of specialized empirical research.

Besides these, no further restrictions on the relevant specifications are imposed. In particular the relevant subjects could be more or less the very same possessors, or a subset of them, or an idealized subset of them, or some other disjoint set; the relevant mental responses could be cognitive (a certain belief or judgment), or experiential (the enjoyment of experiences instantiating a certain quale), or desiderative (valuing), (although of course non-mental responses of the subjects like digesting or heart beating are excluded), etc. There is neither the requirement that the concept in question should not figure in the relevant specifications, not even that it should not figure inside the scope of attitudes attributed to the subjects, so that "non-reductive," somehow "circular" accounts are allowed. And those specifications could contain rigidifying devices.

To illustrate, any of the following are rd biconditionals for the concepts expressed by the predicates on the respective left-hand side, and thus the holding *a priori* of any of them would make that concept response-dependent in the present original sense of (RD₀):

Something is red iff it has the disposition to produce in perceptually normal humans the non-inferentially-based belief that it is red under sunny daylight conditions;

Something is red iff it has the disposition to produce in perceptually normal humans as they actually are the non-inferentially-based belief that it is red under sunny daylight conditions as they actually are;

Something is red iff it has the disposition to produce in perceptually normal humans an experience instantiating a red' quale in normal viewing conditions;

Something is a value iff we, whatever we are like, are disposed to desire to desire it under conditions of the fullest possible imaginative acquaintance with it;

Something is funny iff we are disposed to be amused by it under appropriate attentive conditions.

Something is possible iff an ideal conceiver could conceive it.

Now several philosophers¹ have provided arguments that in my view compellingly show that the original characterization of response-dependent concepts by Johnston we have just considered, along the lines of (RD₀), does not succeed with respect to his original, metaphysical, project, i.e. of appropriately generalizing the notion of a secondary quality.

The main element can be put straightforwardly: there are also rd biconditionals for

¹ Including Manuel García-Carpintero (2007), Jussi Haukioja (2000), Frank Jackson (1998, Jackson & Pettit 2002), Philip Pettit (1991, 1998b, Jackson & Pettit 2002), and Ralph Wedgwood (1998).

concepts for—what we reasonably take to be—*primary* qualities which hold a priori. Or more generally, there are concepts that are response-dependent, in the sense of (RD₀), independently of whether they signify primary, fully objective, properties. If that is so, then the notion of a response-dependent concept of (RD₀), interesting as it could be for *other* reasons, fails with respect to the project for which it was introduced.²

Why is this? Take a predicate signifying—what we reasonably take to be—a primary quality, like ‘is hot’ or ‘is cubic.’ It arguably does so in virtue of being associated with some reference-fixing material that, it seems, would crucially involve the relevant mental responses of subjects like us in question. But then there will be rd biconditionals for the concepts expressed by the predicate in question such that their left-hand-side expresses that reference-fixing material, along the lines of:

Something is hot iff it is disposed to produce the sensation of heat in normal humans in normal conditions;

Something is cubic iff it has the disposition to produce in perceptually normal humans an experience instantiating a cubic’ quale in normal viewing and tactile conditions.

Now, for reasons familiar since Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity* (1980), the fact that the relevant material plays at least a reference-fixing role suffices for those biconditionals to hold *a priori*, analogously as it holds a priori ‘the standard Paris meter is one meter’ (assuming that the length of the standard Paris meter plays a reference-fixing role with respect to ‘meter’). But then, although ‘is hot’ and ‘is cubic’ signify—what we reasonably take to be—primary qualities, they express concepts that *are* response-dependent, in the sense of (RD₀).

Another way of putting the point is as follows. ‘is red’ clearly seems to express a response-dependent concept in the sense of (RD₀). Suppose that it is because the following holds *a priori*:

Something is red iff it has the disposition to produce in perceptually normal humans an experience instantiating a red’ quale in normal viewing conditions.

Will the acknowledging of this suffice for rejecting the so-called primary view on colors, according to which red is a primary, fully objective, property? It doesn’t seem so. On the contrary, defenders of the primary view may be quite willing to accept that something like this holds a priori. And the reason could be put as before: even if ‘red’ signifies a primary quality, it arguably does so in virtue of being associated with some reference-fixing material that involves the relevant mental responses of subjects like us in question. That being so, there will be rd biconditionals for *red* expressing that material and thus holding *a priori*. Given this, then, we can conclude that (RD₀) should be modified, at least insofar as the original project for which response-dependence was introduced is pursued.³

² For alternative purposes that the original characterization, or a closely related one, might help pursuing see Jackson & Pettit (2002) and Hauikioja (2000).

³ Wasn’t it apparent to Mark Johnston himself? I think it was. Just after his original characterization of the notion, he adds in a footnote: “At least this holds with one proviso having to do with concepts introduced by reference-fixing descriptions.... Everyday terms for shapes might provide some examples.” (Johnston, 1989: 146, fn. 8). (And in all his subsequent contributions to the debate, he explicitly characterizes response-

Let me make one final comment. The full arguments of the philosophers mentioned above aim at a more ambitious conclusion, namely that response-dependence, in the sense of (RD₀), is a global phenomenon or at least that response-dependence concepts, in the sense of (RD₀), are ubiquitous (see, besides those papers, Stoljar & Smith (1998), Pettit (1998a) for discussion). I tend to agree. But it is important to notice that for our present purposes—namely discussing the aptitude of the original notion of (RD₀) of pursuing the original project—that this further conclusion is not needed. It suffices for rejecting (RD₀) the fact that *some* particular concepts for primary qualities would count as response-dependent according to it.

3. Response-Dependent Properties

Let me briefly take stock. We have seen that the notion of response-dependence comes to the literature with the aim of appropriately generalizing (and hence not over-generalizing) the notion of a secondary quality, but that that is something that the particular characterization originally offered, (RD₀), fails to accomplish given that it would make concepts for primary qualities response-dependent.

According to a more or less traditional view, secondary qualities are—or would be—not fully objective features of external objects in that it is essential for something having them that it bears a certain relation to responses of ours, at least as we actually are. It seems as if, for response-dependence to pursue the aim of appropriately generalizing that notion, it should better distinguish between properties themselves, and not concepts thereof, and hence require the relevant rd biconditionals to have certain *metaphysical* status, capturing the “essentialist” component alluded to.

One first thought in that direction will *not* do.

A property is response-dependent iff there is a response-dependence-giving biconditional for a concept signifying it which holds *necessarily*.

The reason is parallel to that just considered above, in that the proposal would fail by covering primary qualities as well. Let ‘is F’ be a predicate signifying a primary, fully objective property which expresses a response-dependent concept in the former sense of (RD₀). Then take any particular true response-dependence-giving biconditional for them, and add to the specifications of the subjects, the responses and the conditions the rigidification device “as they actually are” as to have something with the form:

x is F iff x is disposed to produce in subjects S as they actually are the responses R as they actually are in conditions C as they actually are.

This biconditional, due to the semantics of ‘actually,’ will be *necessarily* true, and hence the property in question, primary by assumption, would count as response-dependent. (Remember that such rigidified specifications were allowed in rd biconditionals.) Indeed, this was my reason for not including, when characterizing (RD₀) the requirement that the relevant rd biconditionals should hold not only *a priori* but *necessarily* (a requirement

dependence by means of identities, among concepts or properties, and no longer in terms of the apriority of the relevant biconditionals.) But of course, the proviso would make (RD₀) useless, at least with respect to the original project.

which, although absent in Johnston's (1989) characterization, is commonly added). That requirement, when rigidified specifications are allowed—but only then—is not a *further* requirement: whenever there is an *a priori* rd biconditional for a concept there is also a necessary and *a priori* (suitably rigidified) rd biconditional for it. (Conversely, when rigidified specifications are allowed nothing changes if an existing necessity requirement is *removed*, *pace* Haukioja (2001).)

According to Manuel García-Carpintero (2007) and Ralph Wedgwood (1998), the failure to capture those particular essentialist claims alluded to in terms of the modal notion of necessity is nothing but a special case of the general failure to capture essentialist claims in terms of necessity, a general failure which was strongly defended by Kit Fine (1994).

The main idea behind Fine's view is delicate and subtle. But, for my present purposes, it can be sufficiently illustrated (I hope) with the help of the following examples. It is a necessary property of Socrates that he belongs to the set whose sole member is Socrates. That is a property which is impossible for Socrates to fail to have. But this property hardly is, it seems, an essential property of his: there seems to be nothing in the essence or the nature of Socrates which involves his belonging to any set whatsoever. As Fine puts it, "Strange as the literature on personal identity may be, it has never been suggested that in order to understand the nature of a person one must know which sets he belongs to." (Fine 1994, 5) Another example could help. It is a necessary property of Plato that he is not identical to Aristotle. That is again a property which is impossible for Plato not to have. But again it hardly seems to be an essential property of Plato. Otherwise Aristotle and any different object, for that matter, would be involved in explicating the nature of Plato.

The moral drawn by Fine from these and related considerations is this: *essence* is a finer-grained notion than *necessity*, in that it is sensitive to the "source" of the latter, as it were. Even if it is necessarily the case that Socrates belongs to his singleton, this is not something that holds in virtue of the nature of Socrates (but arguably in virtue of the nature of the singleton). And again, even if it is necessarily the case that Plato is not identical to Aristotle, this is not something that holds in virtue of the nature of Plato (but arguably in virtue of *both* the nature of Plato and the nature of Aristotle). (But what does the claim that something holds in virtue of the nature of a given entity exactly amount to? According to Fine, there is no answer to this question, to the extent that it is regarded as requesting for a reductive explication of this essentialist notion in terms of different notions, like modal notions. Rather, the concept of essence is conceptually basic. But that does not preclude there being an answer to the question, when it is not so interpreted, by illuminatingly systematizing truths involving it. There seems to be nothing especially mysterious in that: there could hardly be conceptual reductions of all concepts. Structurally the same arguably happens with conceptually basic logical concepts, such as that of conjunction.)

Let me come back now to response-dependence. The proposal is then that in the case of response-dependent properties, the necessity of the relevant rd biconditional has its source in the very nature of the property in question, whereas nothing like this is true of the (also necessary) rd biconditionals corresponding to primary, fully objective, properties. The general characterization of a response-dependent property, can then be put thus:

(RD) A property is response-dependent iff there is a response-dependence-giving

biconditional for a concept signifying it which holds in virtue of the nature of that property.

4. The Makings of Truth by Response-Dependent Properties

Suppose that ‘is funny’ signifies a response-dependent property, in the sense characterized by (RD), by the following holding in virtue of its nature:

Something is funny iff we are disposed to be amused by it under appropriate attentive conditions.

It seems there are the following two ways in which this can be so, which illustrate two ways a property can be response-dependent.

Perhaps with respect to each context, ‘is funny’ contributes a property that involves (say) the sense of humor of the speaker of that context—and those disposed to be amused as this speaker is. As there could be variation of senses of humor, ‘is funny’ could contribute different properties at different contexts. Each of these properties, however, could be response-dependent, in the characterized sense. Suppose ‘is funny’ contributed the property of being funny_c with respect to context *c*. Then, with respect to that context,

something is funny iff we are disposed to be amused by it under appropriate attentive conditions

will hold true, we can assume, in virtue of the nature being funny_c—where ‘we’ specifies a population relevantly like the speaker of *c*.

The truth I would express by saying ‘Family Guy is funny’ would be made true, according to the proposal, by a truthmaker involving the response-dependent property of being funny_c, if *c* is my current context. And this is compatible with somebody else forming a contrasting view, in the way characteristic of faultless disagreement. The truth she would express by saying ‘Family Guy is not funny’ would in turn be made true by a truthmaker involving the response-dependent property of being funny_{c*}, if *c** is her current context. These two truthmakers, involving different properties, can certainly coexist in actuality, accounting for the faultlessness component of faultless disagreement. (For the disagreement component of faultless disagreement, see next section.) These two truthmakers are presumably not minimal truthmakers, almost certainly so if physicalism about the mental is sound. But the proposal under consideration contends that there would be response-dependence-involving truthmakers for such truths, not that they be minimal.

This is not the only way, however, in which ‘is funny’ can signify a response-dependent property, in the sense characterized by (RD). Suppose that with respect to each context, ‘is funny’ contributes one and the same property, being funny. But suppose that that this is a *flexible* property, in that something has it (in a world) only relative to (say) a sense of humor—so that one particular thing can have it (in a world) relative to one sense humor, but lack it (in the same world) relative to another.⁴ Assuming that each context *c* determines the sense of humor of the speaker of *c* as the relevant one for truth at that context, then with respect to that context,

⁴ It might well be that only non-fundamental, derived properties can be flexible in this sense.

something is funny iff we are disposed to be amused by it under appropriate attentive conditions

will hold true, we can assume, in virtue of the nature being funny—where ‘we’ specifies a population relevantly like the speaker of c .

The truth I would express by saying ‘Family Guy is funny’ would be made true, according to the proposal, by a truthmaker involving the response-dependent property of being funny. And this is again compatible with somebody else forming a contrasting view, in the way characteristic of faultless disagreement. The truth she would express by saying ‘Family Guy is not funny’ would in turn be made true by a truthmaker involving the same response-dependent property of being funny. But that property being flexible in the envisaged sense allows that one and the same particular thing has it with respect to the sense of humor determined by my current context c , while lacks it with respect to the sense of humor determined by her current context c^* . So again, the two truthmakers, although involving the same relevant flexible response-dependent property, can coexist in actuality, accounting again for the faultlessness component of faultless disagreement.

Likewise for the tasty, the sexy, the cool, and generally discourses allowing for both truth and faultless disagreement.

5. Contextualisms and Relativisms

These two ways ‘is funny’ can contribute a response-dependent property correspond to different versions of *moderate* relativism, as discussed in recent debates on contextualism and relativism. Thus the view presented here—according to which truths about the funny, the tasty, the sexy, and the cool, have (perhaps non-minimal, non-ultimate) truthmakers that involve response-dependent properties—contrasts not only with pluralism about truth, but also with radical relativism about truth, of the sort defended by MacFarlane with respect to various domains.

According to moderate relativism, endorsing appearances of faultless disagreement can be done within the general classical semantic framework where they are features of the context that determine the appropriate truth value for sentences at that context, see Lewis (1980). It seems that Hannah and Sarah may disagree as to whether Family Guy is funny, without either of them being at fault, and indeed this can actually be so in virtue of some feature of Hannah’s context (say, Hannah’s sense of humor) making true the sentence ‘Family Guy is funny’, while some feature of Sarah’s context (say, Sarah’s different sense of humor) making false ‘Family Guy is funny.’ In general, according to moderate relativism, appearances of faultless disagreement are manifested by a certain sort of contextual variation of sentences’ appropriate truth-values: it seems that sentence s can be true at a certain context c but false at another context c^* . Endorsement of such appearances can be done respecting the moderate characteristic contention, as it may in effect be the case that s is true at c but false at c^* , in virtue of different features of c and c^* .⁵

⁵ In contrast, and partly motivated by the works of John MacFarlane, some people have been convinced that this framework is shown to be inappropriate by a special sort of variation in some philosophically interesting cases: a sentence s as said in a particular context c could still be true from a certain perspective but false from another—where perspectives are to be thought of as the same sort of thing as contexts, but representing a

According to *indexical contextualism*, the different features of c and c^* make it the case that the content of sentence s at c is different from that of s at c^* , so that s at c can be true while s at c^* is false. According to *non-indexical contextualism*, the different features of c and c^* make it the case that the same content of sentence s at c and at c^* receives a different value with respect to the circumstances of evaluation of c and of c^* —comprising the features that are relevant for the truth of the contexts of sentences at contexts—so that again s at c can be true while s at c^* is false.

It seems pretty straightforward how indexical contextualism accounts for the faultlessness of the judgments that could be expressed by using s at c but not at c^* . What about the facts involving intuitions of disagreement, as revealed in ordinary disputes in the domain? Part of the recent literature on contextualism and relativism concerns whether such a position vindicates them, after all. Here is Wright’s particularly vivid voicing of the worry that it might not:

If [indexical contextualism] were right, there would be an analogy between dispute of inclinations and the ‘dispute’ between one who says ‘I am tired’ and her companion who replies, ‘Well, I am not’ (when what is at issue is one more museum visit). There are the materials here, perhaps, for a (further) disagreement but no disagreement has yet been expressed. But ordinary understanding already hears a disagreement between one who asserts that hurt-free infidelity is acceptable and one who asserts that it is not. (Wright, 2001: 51).

To the extent to which the difficulty has to do with the absence, according to indexical contextualism, of a common content of the relevant sentence across the relevant contexts, the worry would not arise with respect to alternative non-indexical contextualist versions of moderate relativism.

It is however controversial that intuitions of disagreement are linked to existence of a common content in the way just suggested.

I have argued in López de Sa (2008) that commonality of content is not *necessary* in order to account for intuition of disagreement as revealed in ordinary disputes on these matters. Suppose that ‘is funny’ triggers the presupposition to the effect that the speaker and addressee share sense of humor. Now consider Hannah and Sarah once again. According to the suggestion, ‘is funny’ triggers a presupposition of commonality to the effect that both Hannah and Sarah are similar with respect to humor. Thus, in any non-defective conversation where Hannah uttered ‘Family Guy is funny’ and Sarah replied ‘No, it is not,’ it would indeed be common ground that Hannah and Sarah are relevantly alike, and thus that they are contradicting each other.

In the other direction, MacFarlane has argued in his (2007) that commonality of content is not *sufficient*. Take ‘Dodos are extinct’, and consider an actual utterance of it and

location from where a sentence, as said in a (possibly different) location, is viewed or assessed. To illustrate, ‘Family Guy is funny’ as said at Hannah’s context could still be true when viewed or assessed from the perspective of that very context, but false when viewed or assessed from another perspective, say that of Sarah’s context. This certainly departs from the classical semantic framework as characterized above. Within the framework, ‘Family Guy is funny’ as said at Hannah’s context (with respect to the index that this determines) settles the appropriate truth-value, which is thus insensitive to the perspective from where it can be viewed or assessed. The departure of the framework consisting in allowing that the appropriate truth-value of a sentence as said in a context be sensitive to the perspective from which it is assessed constitutes *radical relativism*. This taxonomy of positions *vis-à-vis* contextualism/relativism is based in MacFarlane (2005, 2009) and discussed further in López de Sa (2010).

a counterfactual one in a world were they were not extinct. According to most people, the content of ‘Dodos are extinct’ is the same across the two contexts, but evaluated different with respect to the world component of the different circumstances of evaluation. But according to MacFarlane, one would be reluctant to describe as *disagreement* the contrast between the judgment I would express by uttering ‘Dodos are extinct’ and the one of my informed counterfactual self in the other world.

Conclusion

Many of us think that it is true that Family Guy is funny, that Roquefort cheese is tasty, that Brad Pitt is sexy, that iPhones are cool. And some of us think that this can be so while relativistically endorsing the appearances of faultless disagreement, constituted by the possibility that someone forms a contrasting judgment without error on part of either them or us—thus rejecting realism about the funny, the tasty, the sexy, and the cool. One way this can be so is if truths in these domains have (perhaps non-minimal, non-ultimate) truth-makers involving response-dependent properties, the essences of which involve responses of subjects like us, giving rise to indexical or non-indexical contextualist versions of moderate relativism. Such a view would thus contrast not only with pluralism about truth, but also with radical relativism about truth.⁶

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