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Making Beautiful Truths

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Consider the funny, the tasty, the sexy, or the cool. In recent years, there has been an explosion of literature concerning matters of “personal taste.” Many of us have thought that appearances of *faultless disagreement*—to the effect that, in some disputes on these matters, it seems that parties could disagree without any of them being thereby at fault—are to be endorsed. Most straightforwardly, we could indeed disagree as to whether, say, *Family Guy* is funny, Roquefort cheese is tasty, Brad Pitt is sexy, or iPhones are cool, and all be speaking the truth when expressing our genuinely contrasting attitudes in the form of, on the face of it, contradictory statements about the issue in question.

Some have also suggested that such a stance may be worth exploring concerning the *evaluative* domain more generally—notably including moral and aesthetic matters. But, it seems fair to say, this more general exploration is not something that the literature mentioned has attempted to perform in a very systematic way. And the suggestion often encounters a reasonable skeptical response, particularly on part of researchers working in ethics and aesthetics. With respect to matters of personal taste, *appearances* of faultless disagreement arguably constitute just a *datum* to be explained away if at the end of the day one prefers not to endorse them. Contrast this with long-term traditional debates concerning the virtuous and the obligatory, on the one hand, or the beautiful and the sublime, on the other. Is it really sensible to hold that appearances of faultless disagreement are present with similar strength in these cases? And, even if they were, is it really sensible to hold that at the end of the day such appearances are to be endorsed, as opposed to explained away?

I wish I were in a position to carry out a general exploration of this kind, and to offer a satisfactory defense of the embedded conjecture against such reasonable skepticism. Unfortunately, I am not. My aim here is rather to present a view, presented in earlier work, that I find particularly attractive concerning matters of personal taste (López de Sa 2008, 2015, and manuscript) and which elaborates on a suggestion by David Lewis (1989). My hope is that presenting this view may nonetheless constitute a (modest) contribution to the more ambitious project by illustrating how some *prima facie* worries against its generalization to aesthetics can be appropriately met (section 2.3). This view may be worthwhile without prejudging the final outcome, for it could help to articulate the crucial disanalogy between matters of personal taste and aesthetics, if such a thing turns out to exist.

In a nutshell, the view has two main components: one on the *metaphysics* of the *existence* of cases of faultless disagreement, and one on the *semantics* of the *expression* of (existent) faultless disagreement in ordinary conversations. In section 2.1, I present the metaphysical component, to the effect that the truthmakers for the claims in question involve *response-dependent properties* ultimately grounded in the contrasting attitudes of the disagreeing subjects. In section 2.2, I present the semantic component, to the effect that the relevant expressions trigger a *presupposition of commonality* that the participants in the conversation are, however, alike in their relevant attitudes. In section 2.3, I explore the prospects for the generalization of this view.

2.1 Metaphysics: Truthmakers with Response-Dependent Properties

2.1.1 Values

Hannah and her wife Sarah differ in their sense of humor: Hannah finds *Family Guy* pretty funny, whereas the show does not amuse Sarah in the slightest. Such a contrast in attitudes may constitute a case of—real, full-blooded, genuine, substantial—*disagreement* between Hannah and Sarah as to whether *Family Guy* is funny. Similarly, people diverge in their tastes for food, in their patterns of sexual attraction, or in the appropriate responses towards the stuff they would classify as cool. From an abstract,

general point of view, these variations in attitudes can be seen as contrasts in *valuings*—an abstract, general form of favorable attitudes.

In his *Dispositional Theories of Value* (1989), David Lewis presented a general account of values as being grounded in such attitudes of *valuings*.

Roughly, values are what we are disposed to value. Less roughly, we have this schematic definition: Something of the appropriate category is a value if and only if we would be disposed, under ideal conditions, to value it (Lewis 1989, 68).

The rest of his paper is devoted to elaborating on the proposal by considering the questions that this schematic definition gives rise to—what is the favorable attitude of ‘valuing’? What is the ‘appropriate category’ of things? What conditions are ‘ideal’ for valuing? Who are ‘we’? What is the modal status of the equivalence? We will be concerned with some of these aspects in this paper. But at this point it may be worth stressing some general aspects of the theory which Lewis himself mentions, which makes it, in my view, particularly attractive.

First, it is naturalistic: it advances an analytical definition of value. It is naturalistic in another sense too: it fits into a naturalistic metaphysics. It invokes only such entities and distinctions as we need to believe in anyway, and needs nothing extra before it can deliver the values. It reduces facts about value to facts about our psychology.

The theory is subjective: it analyses value in terms of our attitudes. But it is not subjective in the narrower sense of implying that value is a topic on which whatever we may think is automatically true, or on which there is no truth at all . . .

The theory is internalistic: it makes a conceptual connection between value and motivation. But it offers no guarantee that everyone must be motivated to pursue whatever is of value; still less, whatever he judges to be of value. The connection is defeasible, in more ways than one.

The theory is cognitive: it allows us to seek and to gain knowledge about what is valuable. This knowledge is a posteriori knowledge of contingent matters of fact. It could in principle be gained by psychological experimentation. But it is more likely to be gained by difficult exercises of imagination, carried out perhaps in a philosopher’s or a novelist’s armchair (Lewis 1989, 68–9).

Values are, according to the theory, *response-dependent properties*—properties that essentially involve certain responses, our *valuings*.

2.1.2 Response-dependence

It is common to characterize some items as *response-dependent* in virtue of the status of certain substantial biconditionals involving the items in question in some way, of the general form:

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

or the form:

- x is F iff subjects S have the disposition to issue the x -directed mental response R under conditions C .

‘Substantial’ is employed 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, whatever they are like, such that something is disposed to produce in them responses R under conditions C iff it is F.” *Mutatis mutandis* for responses R and conditions C .)

Originally, response-dependence was introduced as a feature of *concepts*. Roughly, a *concept* is *response-dependent* in this sense if there is one such biconditional for a predicate expressing it which holds *a priori* (and necessarily), see Johnston (1989). It has been argued, however, that many (perhaps most) concepts turn out to be response-dependent concepts in this sense—particularly concepts for (what we reasonably take to be) primary qualities, for example, being spherical. Thus, this would conflict with the original *metaphysical* project for which the notion had indeed been introduced, aiming to cover both secondary qualities and values *in contrast to*, precisely, primary qualities taken as fully objective properties.

Alternatively, and in a sense more congenial to our current inquiry, one can characterize the response-dependence of the *properties* themselves, as opposed to concepts: roughly, a *property* is *response-dependent* in this sense if the biconditionals in question for a predicate signifying it hold (*a priori* and) *in virtue of its nature*, and hence *necessarily*.

Arguably, the modal condition itself would not suffice, as it is as general as the condition for concepts—at least provided that rigidified characterizations of the subjects and conditions in the biconditionals are allowed. (One such rigidified specification of, say, subjects S would be ‘human beings as they actually are,’ as opposed to the flexible ‘human beings however they may be.’ *Mutatis mutandis* for the responses and the

conditions.) For such rigidifications would have the effect of securing the necessity of the biconditionals regardless of the nature of the property, but “superficially,” as it were.

As I indicated, the original project for the notion of response-dependence was to cover both secondary qualities and values in contrast to primary qualities in a way that vindicated a “qualified realism” for the response-dependent properties, lack of full objectivity notwithstanding (Johnson 1989). To what extent the notion of response-dependent properties succeeds with respect to this project depends, in my view, precisely on the issue regarding whether or not the envisaged rigidifications are allowed. On the one hand, plausibly (although controversially), the biconditionals for secondary qualities require such rigidifications. On the other, plausibly (although controversially), “qualified realism” is jeopardized if the property in question necessarily co-varies with the subjects, responses, and conditions, *flexibly* specified. Wedgwood (1998) *allows* for rigidification, so that it arguably achieves the extension that the project pursued, but loses the significance *vis-à-vis* (qualified) realism. García-Carpintero (2007) *requires* rigidification, so that, arguably, the significance *vis-à-vis* (qualified) realism is secured, but at the cost of losing the desired extension, since values (and perhaps even colors!) would only qualify provided that flexible specifications were in place. In what follows, I propose to follow Johnston (1998) in *excluding* rigidification, so that values arguably qualify—and also maintain uniformity regarding the issue of (qualified) realism, although, surprisingly, in the opposite direction, as it were. (See, for further discussion, López de Sa 2013, and, for the issue of realism, section 2.3 below.)

Response-dependent properties, in this sense, contrast *both* with fully objective properties (the primary qualities) *and* with partially subjective properties that are the dispositions to produce certain responses in some rigidly specified subjects under rigidly specified conditions (the secondary qualities). Perhaps unsurprisingly: “There is a longstanding attempt to make dispositional theories of value and of colour run in parallel. But the analogy is none too good, and I doubt that it improves our understanding either of colour or of value” (Lewis 1989, 80). Thus, on the assumption that (roughly) ‘we’ flexibly specifies the subjects that are disposed to value in the same way as the speaker of the context is, and provided something along the lines of the Lewisian schema holds true in virtue of their nature, values are, according to the view, response-dependent properties.

Exegetical aside: is this “Lewisian” view the one of *David Lewis*? In an often-quoted passage, he says: “Does the dispositional theory imply that, had we been differently disposed those things would have been values? That seems wrong. No: we can take the reference to our dispositions as rigidified” (Lewis 1989, 88–9). Which is sometimes taken to support the view that rigidification does not have a clear bearing on the issue about realism, contrary to my contention. In my view, appearances here are misleading, as the overall argument in which this occurs favors the flexible interpretation:

Psychology is contingent. Our dispositions to value things might have been otherwise than they actually are. We might have been disposed, under ideal conditions, to value seasickness and petty sleaze above all else. . . . [The contingency of value] may well disturb us. I think it is the only disturbing aspect of the dispositional theory. Conditional relativity may well disturb us, but that is no separate problem. What comfort would it be if all mankind just happened to be disposed alike? Say, because some strange course of cultural evolution happened to be cut short by famine, or because some mutation of the brain never took place? Since our dispositions to value are contingent, they certainly vary when we take all of mankind into account, all the inhabitants of all possible worlds. Given the dispositional theory, trans-world relativity is inevitable. The spectre of relativity within our world is just a vivid reminder of the contingency of value (Lewis 1989, 88–9).

For these (perhaps non-actual) relativistic consequences follow only assuming flexibility.

2.1.3 *Grounding*

As Lewis says, the theory *reduces* facts about values to facts about valuing. Stated more generally: according to the theory, values are response-dependent properties *grounded* in responses of ours—the attitudes that are our valuing.

In my view, this actually provides a (controversial but) paradigmatic case of the sort of philosophical contention that constitutes part of the material by which the general notion of *grounding* is precisely to be grasped. Almost everywhere in philosophy—and elsewhere—one finds debates and arguments regarding various things standing in particularly strong, close relations. These, I take it, are paradigmatic cases thereof: that physical properties *determine* mental properties; that facts involving wholes obtain *in virtue of* facts involving their parts; that sets *depend on*

their members; that being money *just is* being used in certain ways by certain people—and that our being disposed to value something is what *makes* it good. As I said, such philosophically controversial theses constitute paradigmatic exemplars which, in my view, provide the materials for the initial grasp of the notion of *grounding* as a way of generally stating such views, articulating the admittedly elusive thought that some things are, in a certain sense, nothing *over and above* some (other) things. This makes grounding a relation which is, at least in principle, absolutely unrestricted *vis-à-vis* its *relata*. It can be taken to hold between any sorts of things whatsoever—properties, facts, individuals, events, and what-have-you. Just like *identity*. And this makes grounding a relation *compatible* with identity as arguably the most straightforward way something can be said to be nothing “over and above” some thing is, of course, by being identical to it. In effect, the paradigm cases of controversial grounding claims considered are indeed sometimes submitted as being backed up by strict identities. Take precisely the reductive view about values that Lewis seems to suggest for a particularly vivid illustration: if facts about values reduce to facts about valuing, then this should definitely suffice for values being ultimately grounded in attitudes. So grounding had better be compatible with identity. (This contrasts with the often-made assumption that grounding need be *irreflexive*. The assumption is not innocuous, as some alleged puzzles of grounding exploit this assumed irreflexivity (see for further discussion Jenkins 2011). Something is *fundamental* if it is not grounded in other things. Something is *derivative* if it is not fundamental.

So, like many other claims in philosophy, the general Lewisian view about values can be seen as a characteristic grounding claim to the effect that values are response-dependent properties grounded in our attitudes of valuing.

2.1.4 Truthmaking

The first metaphysical component of the view to be presented has it that the response-dependent properties that are the values, ultimately grounded in the (potentially contrasting) attitudes of subjects like us, figure in truthmakers for claims in the domain in question—which, as we will see, crucially helps to account for the existence of cases of faultless disagreement.

According to the truthmaking insight, truths do not float free in a void but must be anchored in reality. The most straightforward way of vindicating this insight is, of course, to hold that each truth requires a *truthmaker*: something in virtue of which the truth is true, see Armstrong (2004).

As introduced, the point of the notion of truthmaking is to generally state a “trans-categorical” way in which truths depend on things that are not truths but other bits of reality. (Which is compatible with, although need not entail, the possibility that it induces some (other) relation *between truths*). By itself, it is neutral about the nature of its *relata*—besides that it relates things other than truths to truths, that is. As to the nature of the things that are truthmakers, they may be individuals, tropes, states of affairs, or what-have-you—even things some would regard with suspicion, such as absences, insofar as truthmaking goes. As to the nature of the things that are truths, they may be thoughts, “propositions,” sentences (in context), particular speech acts, or what-have-you, insofar as truthmaking goes.

According to many, the truthmaking insight captures the core of so-called correspondentist views about truth—abstracting away from some strictures concerning, precisely, *correspondence*. For one given thing may make true many truths. My sitting here right now may make it true that there is somebody in the room, in the flat, in the building, in the city; and that I’m not standing, lying down, flying; and that it was the case that it would be going to be the case that I am sitting, and it is going to be the case that it was the case that I am sitting; and that it’s true that I’m sitting, and it’s true that it’s true that I’m sitting. And, more to the point, one given truth may be made true by many things. The case of the truthmaking of the derivative arguably provides a philosophically interesting illustration. For, arguably, if a truth is made true by something, then it is also made true by that which grounds it. According to the Lewisian view, truths about values are made true by, say, facts about values, of course, but also by facts about valuings (and by more basic facts about socio-psychological dispositions, and facts about (socio-)biology, and, ultimately, facts about physics (provided Physicalism is true)).

Truths about values, the view has it, are (also) made true by truthmakers involving response-dependent properties, grounded in the attitudes of subjects like us. That these attitudes may contrast with one another accounts for the existence of cases of faultless disagreement.

2.1.5 *The funny, the cool, the sexy—the beautiful?*

Now we have all the elements to submit the metaphysical component of the view concerning matters of personal taste—the funny, the tasty, the sexy, the cool—that I find particularly attractive. Take the funny. Suppose, plausibly enough, that ‘is funny’ signifies a response-dependent property, 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.

Arguably, 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 may be variation in senses of humor, ‘is funny’ could contribute different properties in different contexts. Each of these properties, however, could be response-dependent, in the sense characterized. Suppose ‘is funny’ contributes the property of being funny_c with respect to context *c*. Then, with respect to that context, the statement: “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*.

This is not the only way in which ‘is funny’ can signify a response-dependent property, in the sense characterized. 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 of humor, but lack it (in the same world) relative to another. This would correspond to a “non-indexical” alternative to the “indexical” version considered in the main text, see *inter alia* Egan (2014). I am not hostile to the thought that there may be less of a substantial difference between these alternatives—and anyway I will focus on the more popular indexical version. For further discussion, see López de Sa (2010a, 2013, and manuscript).

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* in the existent faultless disagreement. For, were they to speak their minds, all parties would be speaking the literal truth, the contrast between them notwithstanding.

The kind of case under consideration involves a *contrast* in attitudes. Consider again Hannah and her wife Sarah differing in their sense of humor. As many have contended, in my view quite compellingly, such a contrast in attitudes may constitute in itself a case of real, full-blooded, genuine, substantial *disagreement* between Hannah and Sarah as to whether *Family Guy* is funny, for instance (see *inter alia* MacFarlane 2014, and for further references and discussion López de Sa 2015). So the kind of contrast envisaged accounts also for the element of *disagreement* in the existent faultless disagreement. Thus, as anticipated, and most straightforwardly, we could indeed disagree as to, say, whether *Family Guy* is funny, Roquefort cheese is tasty, Brad Pitt is sexy, or iPhones are cool, and all be speaking the truth when expressing our genuinely contrasting attitudes in the form of (on the face of it) contradictory statements on the issue in question.

2.2 Semantics: Conversations with Presupposition of Commonality

2.2.1 *Disagreement?*

Let me briefly take stock. With respect to disputes concerning matters of personal taste, it seems uncontroversial enough that they present the *appearance* of faultless disagreement. It *seems* as if parties could disagree without any of them being thereby at fault. Such appearances are, I take it, just a fact about these domains to be either endorsed or explained away.

One may decide to define as *relativism* the general attempt to endorse the appearances of faultless disagreement present in such discourses. (Relativism, in this general sense, is compatible with, but not committed to, the sort of assessment-sensitivity defended in *inter alia* MacFarlane 2014. For further discussion on the taxonomical and terminological issues, see López de Sa 2010b.)

One prominent version of relativism, in this general sense, is *contextualism* (especially of the indexical variety considered in the previous section). According to it, features of context determine the appropriate truth-value of the sentences as they would be used there (especially, for the indexical variety, by contributing to determining the content of the sentence in context). Variation in features of context (for instance, in differing senses of humor) account for the variation in truth-value of contrasting claims which characteristically manifest (endorsed appearances of) faultless disagreement (for instance, ‘*Family Guy* is funny’/‘It is not’). (For an elaboration, see López de Sa 2010b.) Thus, this (indexical) contextualist version of relativism in general (*contextualism*, for short), straightforwardly accounts for *faultlessness*, as critics also grant.

According to an often-voiced objection, one problem (perhaps the main one) contextualism faces is precisely that it ultimately fails to respect “facts about disagreement,” in spite of its attempts. I have argued in López de Sa (2015) that it is not completely clear what exactly the worry is supposed to be.

On the face of common presentations, it may seem to be a worry concerning the capacity of contextualism to respect facts about the *existence* of disagreement, the attempt notwithstanding. But, as already seen, this would not be a very serious worry. For the notion of *disagreement* is clearly flexible enough as to (literally) cover cases ultimately constituted by contrasting attitudes such as those considered—senses of humor, tastes for food, sexual attraction, and the like. And contextualism (just like almost any other view) is clearly compatible with the *existence* of these. Contextualism is also compatible with the *existence* of *doxastic* disagreement—disagreement that involves contrast in *doxastic* attitudes. In particular, given the view submitted in the previous section, cases of *practical* disagreement—disagreement that involves contrasts in conative attitudes—arguably gives rise to *doxastic* disagreement as well, concerning (say) the contrasting beliefs that *Family Guy* is funny and is not funny. Such contrasting beliefs do not have *contradictory* contents, according to contextualism. But the general notion of (*doxastic*) *disagreement per se* does not require the presence of such contradictory contents. (One can, of course, introduce the further notion of *contradictory* (*doxastic*) disagreement for such a restriction. Now contextualism is *not* compatible with the *existence* of contradictory (*doxastic*) disagreement, as introduced. But that would hardly constitute *per se* an *objection* to

contextualism—as the view can be seen as characteristically contending that the relevant (doxastic) disagreements are *not* contradictory. If there were some consideration to the effect that there *are*, in the relevant kind of case, such contradictory (doxastic) disagreements, *that* could provide a case against contextualism. But that would certainly go far beyond the intuitions concerning (doxastic) disagreement in general present in the appearances of faultless disagreement—which constitute the fact that contextualism attempts to account for.)

Thus the objection that indexical contextualist relativism cannot account for facts about disagreement cannot really be about the *existence* of disagreement, once attention to the flexibility of the notion is properly exercised. Which is not to say that there is not a genuine *prima facie* worry for contextualism in the vicinity—one concerning facts about the *expression* of (existent) disagreement in ordinary conversations in the domain in question.

2.2.2 *Expression*

It appears that you and I can disagree faultlessly as to whether or not *Family Guy* is funny. Contextualism can clearly endorse the appearance of disagreement, as the existence of such a disagreement can be ultimately constituted by our contrasting senses of humor in a perfectly legitimate sense of disagreeing, given the flexibility of the intuitive, ordinary notion of disagreement. Now, according to contextualism, if we were to *express* our disagreement in the most direct, simplest way—by your saying ‘*Family Guy* is funny’ and my responding ‘It is not’—we could both be speaking the plain and literal truth. And this, according to the indexical variety of contextualism, in virtue of the “indexical” contents of these sentences in your context and in my context: that *Family Guy* is funny *for the likes of you*, that *Family Guy* is not funny *for me and my mates* (say). These contrasting contents are *not* contradictory to each other—they can *both* be true: hence the account of *faultlessness*. But clearly—and *this* is the genuine difficulty—the contrasting pair of utterances that would most straightforwardly serve to *express* our disagreement *does seem contradictory* in any ordinary conversation. This is indeed a fact about intuitions concerning the expression of disagreement in ordinary conversations about such matters. I suggest labeling this, inspired by Crispin Wright, the *presumption of contradiction*:

In any ordinary, non-defective conversation, it is common ground among the participants that utterances of (say) ‘*Family Guy* is funny’ and ‘*Family Guy* is not funny’ would contradict each other.

That something along these lines is indeed a *fact* about the expression of (existent) disagreement in the domains in question—failure to respect which would indeed constitute a serious objection to contextualism—is, in my view, robust enough. This at the heart of MacFarlane’s (2014) “disagreement markers”, although the flexibility of disagreement we have been concerned with may advise against such labeling. See also Egan (2014), López de Sa (2008), and Sundell (2011).

Crucially, as we have seen, something like idioms for *presumption* need be in place, if the statement of a sufficiently uncontroversial *fact* about (expressions of existing) disagreements is to be secured—so that, in turn, dialectically it could figure in the materials for a case against contextualism.

This fact about the *expression* of disagreement, as opposed to its *existence*, *does* represent a genuine problem for contextualism. (One which merely stressing the flexibility of disagreement, and the practical ultimate nature of genuine forms thereof, by itself would fail to address, see Huvenes 2012.) For how is it that it is a fact that people would generally *presume* a contradiction if, according to this view, *there need be no such* contradiction?

2.2.3 Commonality

This is indeed a genuine difficulty concerning indexical contextualism’s ability to account for facts about the expression of (existent) disagreement.

Here is my own proposal to meet the difficulty, which constitutes the second semantic component of the general view I favor to the effect that the relevant expressions trigger a presupposition of commonality. (For alternative accounts, which although competing share much of the general aspects, see Sundell 2011 and Zakkou manuscript.)

My proposal elaborates on a suggestion by Lewis:

Wouldn’t you hear them saying ‘value for me and my mates’ or ‘value for the likes of you’? Wouldn’t you think they’d stop arguing after one speaker says *X* is a value and the other says it isn’t?—Not necessarily. They might always presuppose, with more or less confidence (well-founded or otherwise), that whatever relativity there is won’t matter in *this* conversation (Lewis 1989, 84).

According to the presuppositional element, the relevant predicates trigger a *presupposition of commonality* to the effect that the addressees are relevantly like the speaker—or, more generally, that they are relevantly like the way that is salient in the conversation taking place at the center of the context. So in particular, ‘is funny’ triggers the presupposition that the addressees share the relevant sense of humor (say).

2.2.4 *Presuppositions*

The notion of *presupposition* I presuppose is basically Stalnakerian. Here is a recent statement of the core by Stalnaker himself (replacing ‘context’ (set) for ‘conversation’ in order to avoid confusion with Lewisian ‘contexts’):

Acceptance . . . is a category of propositional attitudes and methodological stances towards a proposition, a category that includes belief, but also some attitudes (presumption, assumption, acceptance for the purposes of an argument or an inquiry) that contrasts with belief, and with each other. To accept a proposition is to treat it as true for some reason. One ignores, at least temporally, and perhaps in a limited context, the possibility that it is false . . . It is common ground that φ in a group if all members *accept* (for the purposes of the conversation) that φ , and all *believe* that all accept φ , and *believe* that all *believe* that all accept φ , etc. The speaker presuppositions [are] the speaker’s beliefs about the common ground . . . A *nondefective* [conversation] is a [conversation] in which the participants’ beliefs about the common ground are all correct. Equivalently, a nondefective [conversation] is one in which all of the parties to the conversation presuppose the same things (Stalnaker 2002, 716–17).

Now in terms of this basic notion of “pragmatic” presupposition, one can characterize the “semantic” presupposition an expression triggers, along the lines of:

A given *expression* triggers a certain presupposition if an utterance of it would be infelicitous when the presupposition is not part of the common ground of the conversation—unless participants accommodate it by coming to presuppose it on the basis of the fact that the utterance has been produced.

It is thus that the semantic component of the view—the presupposition of commonality claim—is to be understood.

2.2.5 “*The funny*,” “*the cool*,” “*the sexy*”—“*the beautiful*?”

I contend that this presuppositional component puts contextualism in a position to account for the envisaged fact concerning the expression of (existent) disagreement—the presumption of contradiction.

Suppose that ‘is funny’ does trigger such a presupposition of commonality. Then utterances of ‘*Family Guy* is funny’ and ‘*Family Guy* is not funny’ would be infelicitous when the presupposition is not part of the common ground of the conversation (unless people accommodate). In any ordinary, non-defective conversation, all of the parties to the conversation presuppose the same things. So, in particular, if you and I were to utter ‘*Family Guy* is funny’ and ‘*Family Guy* is not funny’, participants would presuppose that we all are relevantly alike—we all share the relevant sense of humor. But then it’d be part of the common ground that *Family Guy* cannot be funny for the likes of you but not funny for me and my mates—for it would be part of the common ground that I am one of the likes of you and you one of my mates. So it’d be part of the common ground that the utterances would indeed contradict each other. And that’s the fact that presumption of contradiction states.

What if a presupposition of commonality if the conversation is in fact false? Well, then the participants’ presumption that the utterances contradict each other is also in fact false. Which might be okay for the purpose of the conversation—*accepting* is not *believing*. What if participants actually presuppose otherwise? The prediction is that participants would refrain from using the relevant unconditionalized predicates. Instead, they might cancel out the presupposition by conditionalizing, expressing thus the (existent) disagreement. Which, on the face of it, seems to me to be precisely what happens with ‘is funny’: “Come here and watch this! *Family Guy* is so funny!!”—“*Funny for you, darling*. You should remember that it doesn’t amuse me at all.” For further discussion, see Egan (2014), López de Sa (2008 and 2015).

2.3 From the Funny to the Beautiful?

I have presented the two main components of the view I find particularly attractive on matters of personal taste, one on the metaphysics of the existence of cases of faultless disagreement, and one on the semantics of the expression of (existent) faultless disagreement in ordinary conversations.

The metaphysical component has it that truthmakers for the claims in question involve response-dependent properties ultimately grounded in the contrasting attitudes of the disagreeing subjects. The semantic component has it that the relevant expressions trigger a presupposition of commonality that the participants in the conversation are, nonetheless, alike in their relevant attitudes.

As I said, I will not attempt to vindicate here the generalization of such a view to values in general, including the beautiful and so on. But my hope is that presenting such a view may nonetheless constitute a (modest) contribution to that more ambitious project by illustrating how some *prima facie* worries about its generalization to aesthetics can be appropriately met, and that this view may be worthwhile without prejudging the final outcome, for it could help to articulate the crucial disanalogy between matters of personal taste and aesthetics, if such a thing turns out to exist.

2.3.1 *Non-obviousness*

Admittedly, the proposal is far from being obviously correct. For better or worse, I take it that this is a fairly familiar situation in philosophy, even with proposals that aim in part to articulate explicitly and satisfactorily the nature of concepts that are, in a certain sense, also tacitly or implicitly fully and competently possessed by the very subjects for which such non-obviousness may be striking. Admittedly too, defending this would require us to enter in turn into complex methodological considerations about the nature of philosophy and relevant related fields like linguistics, psychology, sociology, among others, which would, obviously, be out of place here. I just wanted to flag this, and echo Lewis in the paper I have been relying on: “It is a philosophical problem how there can ever be unobvious analyticity. We need not solve that problem; suffice it to say that it is everybody’s problem, and it is not to be solved by denying the phenomenon” (Lewis 1989, 85). Such non-obviousness is perhaps obscured by the toy simplifications of the kind of view under consideration—both by defenders and critics alike—of the sort: funny is what amuses me, tasty is what I like, being sexy is to be found sexy, being cool is seeming to be cool. Such toy simplifications are obviously alright for many purposes. But it is important to be sensitive to the fact that the form of the proposal is itself not bound by such simplifications in order to appropriately assess some of the worries that it may generate,

including the following, related ones. *Possibility of error*: arguably, and quite plausibly, one may be *wrong* about what one thinks is funny, tasty, sexy, cool. But this is something that the non-simplified versions clearly predict: *judging* that things are a certain way, response-dependently, is different from *responding* in the characteristic way. *Appearance/reality*: arguably, and quite plausibly, *finding* something funny, tasty, sexy, or cool is in turn also different from its *being* funny, tasty, sexy, or cool. But again this is something that the non-simplified versions also clearly predict: *responding* to things in the characteristic way is neither necessary nor sufficient for the things in question to have the relevant response-dependent properties, hence the rationale of the *dispositional idioms* that the simplifications tend to abstract away, illustrating the familiar separability of dispositions and their manifestations. *Progress*: Many think that as time goes by there is a general sense of *progress* or *evolution* or *improvement* in the variation of the dispositions to respond. There may be different specific thoughts in the background, but at least one seems to be quite fitting to the type of view. For very plausibly, as time goes by, one progresses, evolves, and improves one's ability to put oneself in the appropriate conditions of manifestation of the relevant dispositions, and to adjust one's judgments on the bases of the eliciting of the relevant responses.

When it comes to the exploration of how well the proposal would extend to cover aesthetic values, it may well be that there are serious worries to do with its prospects in accounting for facts about the possibility of error, the distinction between appearance and reality, or the sense of progress. But these should take the form of specific contentions that go beyond general ones like the ones considered, which are also present in the case of matters of personal taste and pose difficulties only with respect to the toy simplified versions of the view.

2.3.2 Conflict

Perhaps one of the most prominent sources of resistance to the idea that an account of matters of personal taste could be promisingly explored with respect to issues in ethics and aesthetics concerns the connection between the disagreements present in the various domains and the serious, sophisticated, longstanding debates, and indeed conflicts, that characterize ethical and aesthetical matters. How can an account that stems from matters in which such disputes and conflicts are precisely *not*

to be reasonably expected be illuminating with respect to them? *De gustibus non est disputandum*, as the maxim has it.

But is it? According to the present proposal, the faultless disagreement present with respect to such matters of personal taste is ultimately practical in character, grounded in a contrast in attitudes. The prediction is that conflict (debates, disputes) will arise depending on how much is at stake in the contrast in attitudes in question, and the extent to which there is pressure towards coordination. Which is, it seems to me, precisely what one finds in the domains in question. Admittedly, in many mundane cases there is no such pressure, so that parties are typically happy *to agree to disagree*, to quote another saying. But with just some imagination it is easy to come up with scenarios where significant consequences are involved, in a way that affects what looks reasonable as a way of reacting to existing disagreement. To illustrate the point, just conceive of a situation in which the freedom of the King's jester depends on the funniness of his jokes, or the wellbeing of the owner's family depends on the tastiness of the restaurant's sample food. Familiarly, attempting to resolve such conflicts may involve dispute, argument, and deliberation, as well as other forms of practical persuasion with the hope of ultimately altering some or all of the basic dispositions of the parties involved, seeking appropriate coordination. More interesting, real-life examples would of course be worth exploring—the present point is just that the endorsement of appearances of faultless disagreement with respect to matters of personal taste is compatible with acknowledging the possibility of conflict, faultlessness notwithstanding—and that on the face of it the kind of view suggested here can account for this fact and for the ways of reasonably responding to disagreement, were conflict to materialize.

Admittedly again, conflict in the case of disputes in aesthetics may well prove more intractable, and divergences there irremovable. Even so, it may be that they are nonetheless of a similar nature to that of (practically significant) matters of personal taste, perhaps characteristically informed by thoughts about desirable and prospective convergence (see the considerations concerning scope in section 2.3.3). Or it may be that some turn out to be essentially incomparable, in a way that would warrant skepticism as to whether the account for matters of personal taste is to be fruitfully generalized. But sustaining this worry would require a specific kind of consideration, as the general possibility of conflict would not by itself suffice.

2.3.3 Scope

In my own view, one of the most serious potential marks of matters of personal taste *vis-à-vis* philosophically interesting, difficult further domains concerns the extent of convergence to be reasonably expected. Let me explain.

As others have done, I introduced the discussion with the observation that matters of personal taste regarding the funny, the tasty, the sexy, or the cool present appearances of faultless disagreement are either relativistically endorsed or non-relativistically explained away. This consists in the fact that, *in some disputes on these matters*, it seems that the parties may disagree without any of them being thereby at fault. Of course, not *all* disputes on the matters in question exhibit these appearances. On many occasions, disagreements involve fault on the part of some or all of the parties with respect to background matters of fact, failing to be in the appropriate conditions for the manifestation of the relevant responses, and so on. Non-relativistic attempts to explain these appearances away typically emphasize the amount, diversity, and non-obviousness that ways of being at fault may plausibly exemplify in many such disputes. Which is, it seems fair to admit, both plausible and actually illuminating. Illuminating but, it also seems fair to stress, by itself inconclusive, as the relativistic contention that appearances of faultless disagreement are to be endorsed is, as I said, concerned with there being just *some* such cases.

Now, although it is not definitionally characteristic of relativism (at least, as I am suggesting we should conceive of it) that there be some *actual* cases in which appearances of faultless disagreement are to be endorsed, many would agree that this is extremely plausible precisely with respect to matters of personal taste like the funny, the tasty, the sexy, or the cool. That is why non-relativistic attempts to explain away appearances in these domains strike many people as heroic. So it is not merely that we can *conceive* that some disagreements about these matters are faultless, as relativism officially requires, but actually it seems extremely plausible to think that some *actual* disagreements about them are in fact faultless in the way envisaged. Arguably, something along these lines also seems responsible for the difficulty facing the contextualist version of relativism considered above concerning the expression of (existent) faultless disagreement in ordinary conversations. For, as observed, there should be alternative ways of successfully

expressing such disagreements in (equally non-defective) conversations where commonality is not presupposed and *uncommonality* is actually presupposed.

Now one potential mark of matters of personal taste may concern precisely this. Maybe with respect to the other domains it is less clear that appearances of faultless disagreement are to be endorsed in *actual* cases. Just to illustrate, it may turn out that in these domains the relevant dispositions involved in the contrasting attitudes in question are more plausibly regarded as part of human nature, as it were, so that, with respect to actual disputes, a rationale for not cancelling the presupposition of commonality may turn out to be available. Maybe with respect to the beautiful and the good, and perhaps in contrast to the funny and the tasty and the sexy and the cool, we are all, in fact, relevantly alike.

2.3.4 *Realism?*

I just said that maybe with respect to the beautiful and the good, and perhaps in contrast to the funny and the tasty and the sexy and the cool, we are all *in fact* relevantly alike. But, truth being told, generalizing the account of matters of personal taste is indeed *relativistic* in that one can certainly conceive that we are *not*. This is part of the admission by David Lewis I quoted above (here repeated):

Psychology is contingent... [The contingency of value] may well disturb us. I think it is the only disturbing aspect of the dispositional theory. Conditional relativity may well disturb us, but that is no separate problem. What comfort would it be if all mankind just happened to be disposed alike? Say, because some strange course of cultural evolution happened to be cut short by famine, or because some mutation of the brain never took place? Since our dispositions to value are contingent, they certainly vary when we take all of mankind into account, all the inhabitants of all possible worlds. Given the dispositional theory, trans-world relativity is inevitable. The spectre of relativity within our world is just a vivid reminder of the contingency of value (Lewis 1989, 88–9).

I have been suggesting the use of the term ‘relativism’ for the general attempt to endorse appearances of faultless disagreement, in a way that is compatible with but not committed to the view that these include some actual cases, to the extent that they are conceivable. Alternatively (and this is perhaps Lewis’s own favorite usage in the paper), one could use the label for the view that includes a further claim of this kind about actuality.

There are various options with respect to ‘realism’ too. On one possible legitimate usage, it precisely contrasts with ‘relativism’, as I am using it. The generalization of the view presented for matters of personal taste is *relativistic*, as understood, and in that sense contrasts with *realism*, as understood.

I myself am sympathetic to this usage. For the relativistic flexibility of the response-dependent properties that are generally the values, according to the view, contrast both with fully objective properties, like the primary qualities and also with the less-than-fully objective (rigidly) dispositional properties like the secondary qualities, and this usage allows us to mark this as a contrast with *realism*.

Importantly, however, the view does *not* contrast with realism on a number of similarly legitimate alternative ways of using the expression. Statements about the beautiful and the good—as in the case of statements about the funny and the tasty and the sexy and the cool—are, according to the view, capable of being true, some of them are true, some of them are known to be true, and some of them are known to be true in a way that is compatible with the possibility of error, the distinction between appearance/reality, and a sense of progress.

Again, admittedly, there is room here for the existence of specific considerations arguing against the generalization. But again, these should be *specific*, in that the general senses in which the view is and is not relativistic and realist seem, on the face of it, fully apt for the generalization.

2.3.5 *Towards the beautiful*

I have presented a view about matters of personal taste that is relativistic in the sense of endorsing the appearances of faultless disagreement present in some disputes in the domains in question. Metaphysically, it contends that the truthmakers for the relevant statements involve response-dependent properties, ultimately grounded in the contrasting attitudes of the disagreeing subjects, which accounts for facts about the existence of faultless disagreement. Semantically, it contends that the relevant expressions trigger a presupposition of commonality, which accounts for facts about the expression of (existent) faultless disagreement.

The view could be generalized to cover other philosophically interesting cases, notably the beautiful and so on along the lines of the general Lewisian dispositional theory of values. Exploring such a generalization in full is not something I have attempted here. But, as I said, my aim was

to offer a (modest) contribution to that more ambitious project by illustrating how some *prima facie* worries about its generalization to aesthetics can be appropriately met. This may help to articulate the crucial disanalogy between matters of personal taste and aesthetics, if such a thing turns out to exist.*

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