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### Publication Date

2011

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**Matters of Taste Are Not “Mere Matters of Taste”**

by

Stanley Hong-Sen Chen

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Philosophy

in the

Graduate Division  
of the  
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:  
Professor John MacFarlane, Co-chair  
Professor Barry Stroud, Co-chair  
Professor Line Mikkelsen

Spring 2011

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Stanley Hong-Sen Chen

## Abstract

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by

Stanley Hong-Sen Chen

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Berkeley

Professor John MacFarlane, Co-chair

Professor Barry Stroud, Co-chair

It is common to accept subjectivism about matters of gustatory taste, the view that gustatory reasons and the truth of gustatory judgments are essentially dependent on our tastes or interests. In this dissertation, I argue against this commonplace by suggesting that examination of our gustatory practices does not drive us to gustatory subjectivism. I take up four aspects of our practices.

First, we acquire new tastes. The acquisition of taste is, I suggest, done on the basis of gustatory reasons that are not essentially sourced in our tastes or interests. Subjectivism cannot allow such reasons, and understanding taste acquisitions in this manner allows us to make sense of certain “second-order” evaluative attitudes we take towards those acquisitions.

Second, we resist accepting gustatory testimony, which may suggest that gustatory reasons are dependent on one’s tastes. I argue against this suggestion by appealing to a gustatory value: that of abiding by one’s own tastes. This gustatory value comes into conflict with epistemic values that demand that we believe reliable testimony, and this conflict makes sense of our resistance without presupposing subjectivism.

Third, we nonchalantly engage in intractable taste disputes, which may again suggest that gustatory reasons are dependent on one’s tastes. However, without presupposing subjectivism, we can make sense of our nonchalance in terms of the dialectical nonchalance we feel when we are faced with disagreements that inevitably violate their constitutive goal: that of resolution via non-question-begging arguments.

Fourth, we compare and adjudicate between very different gustatory values. If those values are not measurable on a single scale, such “superhard” comparisons may motivate a subjectivist understanding of gustatory reasons. Here I suggest that the sense that such comparisons might motivate subjectivism derives from the inaccurate assumption that rational comparisons must be made on the basis of an independent guide. Giving up the assumption, we can construe such comparisons case-by-case as ones in which either one side trumps the other overall, or reason is simply indifferent between them.

For Nigel, who feeds but has yet to dine.

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# Acknowledgments

Besides showering me with kindness and often undeserved patience, my dissertation advisors have provided me with different but equally laudable support over the past number of years. I am grateful to Barry Stroud for always providing a context for my jumbled thoughts and jumbled writing; and for his exceedingly long vision and refined philosophical sensibilities. I am grateful to John MacFarlane for his untiring dedication to slogging through even the little steps (and missteps) of my work, and always with an artful balance of technical skill and sensitivity to philosophical importance. I'd also like to thank my outside reader, Line Mikkelsen, for helping me even on such unreasonably short notice.

I am also grateful to Mike Rieppel, for being an excellent sounding board, and George Tsai, for keeping my philosophical curiosity alive, and to both for the many helpful conversations. Many other grad students helped me along academically. I'd like to thank: Erica Klempner, for conversations about aesthetics and testimony; Lindsay Crawford, for conversations about disagreement; Kerstin Haase, for conversations about objectivity in ethics; James Stazicker, for conversations about metaphysics and color; Matt Parrott, who I learn from just by teaching with; Berislav Marusic, for forcing me to seriously worry about skepticism; the many grad students who have helped me with various semantics stuff; and the many grad students who have begrudgingly engaged with some form of my "meta"-philosophical worries. I'd like also to thank Dave Lynaugh and Janet Groome for greasing the wheels of bureaucracy, and Local123 and Commonwealth for letting me (and the other downtrodden) work in their spaces.

And then there was all that life outside of academia. Thank you to Mike, Anna, Lindsay and Bill for the regular "keeping ourselves sane" happy hours; to Anna for cooking me through the first year; to Bill for Berlin; and to Zack and Nishaant, for showing me an intellectual life outside of academia. Finally, I cannot be more grateful to Chanel for her unwavering love and support (not to mention delightful dining companionship!); and to my family, who continue to make things possible for me.



# Introduction

It is not just philosophical commonplace to think that matters of gustatory taste—what is delicious, tasty, scrumptious, and so on—are “merely subjective.” It is also just commonplace, period. For instance, it is a commonplace refrain, even among those who professionally write about and critically judge food, that matters of taste are, well, “mere matters of taste!” We use the very label of the issue as an idiom to express what is “merely subjective.” This dissertation attempts to question this refrain.

But not very directly. For one, I say nothing in the dissertation directly about the metaphysics of, say, the property (if it is one) of deliciousness. So, for instance, I do not deal with any scientific facts about “flavor compounds” or our ability to detect “flavor.” One may wonder how one could possibly determine whether something is subjective or objective—whether something’s nature essentially depends on us or not—without saying something directly about the metaphysics—i.e., the nature—of the thing. Hopefully, some philosophers will agree with me that “saying something directly about the metaphysics” is not the only thing—maybe even not the most important thing—to do in figuring out what we can say about whether some matter is subjective or objective (or something in between). What I focus on instead is what we are to say about how we talk and think about matters of gustatory taste, as well as how we act in relation to such matters. This is because, before we can say that everything we think about matters of taste is all wrong, or all right, or somewhere in between, we have to know what it is we even think and how it is we even speak about such things.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, even focusing on this latter issue, I say nothing of very general principle about it. Instead, I just take up a number of things that some philosophers have thought would suggest that we think or talk about matters of taste as if they were merely subjective. I consider whether the acquisition of taste; our attitudes towards gustatory testimony and advice; the way we go about disagreeing about matters of taste; and the way we compare gustatory goods show us something about whether we are best understood as thinking of matters of taste as merely subjective. I consider, that is, whether these phenomena “point to” (*ceteris paribus*) subjectivism. I will argue that they do not. This may amount to arguing that they point instead to objectivism, if objectivism is thought to be just the denial

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<sup>1</sup>Another thing to keep in mind here is that it is plausible that even a “direct” metaphysician will (eventually?) have to use our ordinary concepts competently; this may put restrictions on *how much* we can ignore how it is we talk and think, even when we are doing metaphysics.

of subjectivism. Even if so, I will not be giving my own, substantive, objectivist theory. (For instance, I will not be giving a theory that tells us what sorts of things essentially constitute something's being delicious.) Rather, my arguments will simply be attempts to make sense of these phenomena in such a way as to be consistent with objectivism. If my "making sense" of the phenomena is pretty plausible—compared to the way a subjectivist might make sense of them—then that would be reason to think that the path from those phenomena to subjectivism is not just straightforward. Subjectivism about taste should not be *commonplace*.

Chapter 1 of the dissertation will explore the acquisition of new gustatory tastes. I argue in that chapter that the acquisition of new tastes looks like it is done on the basis of gustatory reasons—considerations in favor of thinking something is delicious. I argue this by appealing to a distinctive, negative evaluative attitude we take towards acquisitions of taste—that of evaluating them as "bullshit." These evaluations suggest that those gustatory reasons we base our acquisitions on are not essentially sourced in our interests, purposes or even our tastes—our preferences (our likes or dislikes), or dispositions to enjoy or not. I call such reasons "distinctively gustatory reasons." If this is right, it is a burden for a subjectivist—someone who thinks that the truth of gustatory matters is in some essential way dependent on our interests, purposes or tastes—to account for the appearance of such reasons in our gustatory practice, since the subjectivist who relativizes truth to subjective factors will be pressured to understand gustatory reasons as not being distinctively gustatory in the above sense. I continue my argument by distinguishing the evaluative attitude to which I appeal from another one that does not have to do with distinctively gustatory reasons: that of evaluating them as "authentic." Also, I suggest that gustatory reasons seem to appear even in the various examples and considerations that some subjectivists use to motivate their semantic accounts of "delicious" (and such gustatory predicates).

The first chapter thus sets up an issue that occupies me throughout the dissertation: whether there is anything in our gustatory practices that suggests that gustatory reasons must be essentially sourced in our interests, purposes or tastes. The second chapter takes this issue up by considering another aspect of our gustatory practices: the giving and taking of gustatory testimony and advice. An old reason for thinking that certain areas of discourse must not be fully objective is the thought that, in those areas, we rely much less on others to form our beliefs. Subjectivists think that this phenomenon is to be understood epistemically—in particular in terms of the special nature of gustatory reasons, i.e., that they are essentially sourced in our personal taste experiences, which are exactly those sorts of things that are not easily "passed along" between people. Although the old thought was applied primarily to aesthetics, it is a worry also for gustatory matters. In the second chapter, I attempt to more carefully describe the phenomenon of what I call "resistance to gustatory testimony," and I argue that we can make sense of this phenomenon consistently with objectivism. Some objectivists attempt to explain resistance to testimony in epistemic terms, though in epistemic terms that are consistent with the denial of merely subjectivist reasons. I suggest that, instead, the objectivist should understand the phenomenon in non-epistemic terms. Specifically, I suggest that the objectivist should understand the phenomenon in

terms of a gustatory value we have: the value of structuring our gustatory lives around our own tastes, a value I call “gustatory authenticity.” This value makes sense of our resistance without forcing us to deny the epistemic power of (reliable) gustatory testimony. We may be epistemically moved by reliable gustatory testimony, but we are also strongly pulled by the (non-epistemic) value of being authentic—being true to our own gustatory likes and affective reactions. This may result in conflict, which may or may not result in the actual acceptance of testimony, but this sense of conflict exactly respects much of the “phenomenology” of resistance to testimony.

Resistance to testimony is supposed to drive us to the subjectivist idea that our tastes *must* be consulted to have gustatory justification. Another avenue of subjectivist motivation is to consider instead the idea that our tastes are *enough* to have gustatory justification, and, similarly, that we especially “freely” make gustatory judgments. This idea I take up in two chapters. The third chapter of the dissertation considers the possibility that the idea is based on a worry about taste disagreement. The fourth chapter considers the possibility that the idea is based on a certain combination of commitments involving the making and assessing of taste assertions. Philosophers familiar with the current literature on gustatory predicates may recognize the idea here as being close to the idea that gustatory predicates sustain so-called “faultless disagreement.” The division I make between the third and fourth chapters can be thought of as an attempt to split motivations toward subjectivism between those that emphasize the “faultlessness” of taste disagreement; and those that emphasize just the “faultlessness” of taste assertions or judgments, independently of their involvement in disagreements.

In the third chapter, I consider the line of thought that suggests that a subjectivist has a better explanation of why we especially “freely” make gustatory judgments. This line of thought is based on what has been called the “chauvinism” worry, whereby an objectivist supposedly cannot explain, without uncharitably attributing chauvinism to ordinary asserters, how we seemingly nonchalantly assert things about matters of taste on the basis of our own tastes, even in the face of so many others who make conflicting assertions on the basis of their differing tastes. I argue that, if we carefully describe or pick out the phenomenon in a way that does not simply presuppose the falsity of objectivism, the objectivist can in fact explain such a phenomenon without uncharitably attributing chauvinism. For he can instead charitably attribute to asserters a certain kind of dialectical “laziness” in the face of the nearly inevitable violation of a “constitutive goal” of disagreement: non-question-beggingly coming to a shared conclusion. Such dialectical laziness does not rule out our continuing to make taste assertions because a violation of a constitutive goal of an activity is not thereby a violation of a constitutive norm of the activity. We continue to make taste assertions because there is nothing *wrong* with doing so, even if one central *point* of the activity is lost. Nevertheless, we care much less about defending them carefully, much like we might care much less about playing tennis well if we know we are going to lose. This makes sense of our nonchalance in the face of the conflicting assertions and tastes of others.

The argument in the third chapter thus leans quite heavily on the idea that a subjectivist is there motivated by some strange characteristic of taste disputes, where the latter is

understood as a dialectical activity, and not merely as a state of disagreement among people who may or may not actually be arguing. This invites the objection that I have missed the point of the “freeness” worry, which was more about how we freely make gustatory *judgments*, and less about how we freely make taste assertions in the face of potential dialectical disputes. The objection is understandable enough, since it looks like there is no *obvious* connection between dialectical “nonchalance” and the subjectivist or non-subjectivist character of gustatory reasons, and so it really looks like it is a non sequitur to speak of dialectical nonchalance.

However, I take up the issue of dialectical nonchalance not only because I think it provides *a* worry against objectivism and I thus want to answer it, but also because I think it is not entirely clear from where the “freeness” worry above really stems. Not having a clear worry here makes it seem as if what we are witnessing is mere *prejudice* against objectivism; so, to take seriously the possibility that there is not such mere prejudice, I attempt to find some concrete phenomenon in our gustatory practices to consider. (In this way, the method in Chapter 3 is broadly similar to that of Chapters 2 and 1.) If we cannot find such a phenomenon, we run the danger of having too theoretical and too question-begging of a dispute between subjectivism and objectivism. This is seen relatively clearly in the contemporary literature’s use of “faultless disagreement” to motivate various semantic theories that have close affinities with subjectivism about taste. Many of these debates have run as disputes between certain more standard forms of contextualism and certain forms of “contextualism” that are radical enough to be thought of as forms of “relativism.” But often both sides of these debates agree that each of them can “account” for the “faultlessness” part of the “phenomenon,” as against, presumably, objectivism, a position which then often gets brushed aside as of not too much importance to the semantic issues.<sup>2</sup> The problem is that “faultlessness” has never been a clear phenomenon. This is especially so when we realize that there are a number of senses in which even an objectivist might think of a disagreement as “faultless.” Once we realize this, we will be left with the task of finding for subjectivism something to say, above and beyond what objectivism would say about taste disputes, or justification or warrant for taste assertions. Chapter 3 attempts to find one concrete thing it might say—about how disputants are not really “chauvinists”—and dispels it as something the objectivist need not deny.

Chapter 4 does more of the same, but by trying to get “closer” to the phenomenon of what I call “criticism and allowance” that characterizes the kinds of semantic theories that try to respect something like “faultless disagreement,” or if not “faultless disagreement,” then just the following combination of ideas: that asserters make taste assertions/judgments especially “freely” and with especially easy “warrant” or “right”; and that we nevertheless assess taste assertions and judgments independently of tasters’ and judges’ tastes. In the fourth chapter, I suggest that it is very difficult to see what concrete phenomenon this combination of ideas is trying to capture (*if* we understand it as trying to capture something different than all the other phenomena I deal with in the other three chapters). Relativism—or the

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<sup>2</sup>And in a way, it is true that objectivism is not of too much importance to the “purely” semantic issues.

view that the truth about matters of taste is assessment-dependent—has special difficulty here because the “practical significance”—and thus, arguably, the very *sense*—of its central notion of relative truth rests on finding some such concrete phenomenon. Furthermore, what the relativist is looking for needs to be pretty special. In particular, the kind of “warrant” or “right” we are looking for is not obviously just an ordinary notion of justification, since if it were, it is unclear how or why the above combination of ideas does not just characterize a form of objectivism.

In the last part of Chapter 4, I suggest an avenue for finding that phenomenon: the case of “superhard” comparisons, whereby we are faced with a plurality of gustatory goods or values that seem both neither better nor worse than each other, and also not just “equally good” (as if they were comparable along a single independent measure, and they equalled in amount on that measure). In such cases, we experience the kind of schizophrenic back-and-forth between criticism and allowance that is associated with the above combination of ideas driving relativism. In response to this, I briefly suggest an avenue of objectivist resistance: the idea that what we have here is a tempting, but unnecessary, move from the lack of “independent guidance” in the comparison to the idea that there must be something rationally special about the comparison.

More needs to be said about such cases, but by the time I reach the end of the fourth chapter, I hope nevertheless to have shown that it is not at all obvious that we think and talk as if matters of taste are subjective. This gives some mild reason, barring further argument, to think that matters of taste are not obviously subjective.

As I suggested, my argumentative goal in this dissertation is very modest. But I think we can distinguish between arguments’ goals and the philosophical value of those arguments. I hope that, despite the modesty of my goal, there is some moderate philosophical value to be had. Here are three broader things I think are at stake or of value here. First, the fact that the issue centers around a supposed paradigmatic instance of the “merely subjective” means that dealing with the issue is a way of dealing with the question of what we even mean by what it is for things to be “merely subjective.” In particular, it is a way of dealing with the question of whether there are any restrictions on how “subjective” an area of discourse may be if it is to be robust enough to sustain truth and falsity in its judgments (or in truth-and-falsity related phenomena). This is a variant of the general question facing what has been called “quasi-realist” accounts of some areas of discourse. Quasi-realism attempts to mimic realism without its “metaphysical commitments,” but what is there to be “quasi” about if quasi-realism so thoroughly mimics realism that it is hard to see the “practical significance” of quasi-realism? Second, whether subjectivism or objectivism “wins,” it is important to see *where* the motivations for subjectivism come from, exactly and realistically. I thus hope the dissertation gives a broader “motivational map” for subjectivism, for it is something that any serious thinker is pulled by, and it is good to “know thyself.” Finally, the various parallels and contrasts I draw or deal with in the following chapters can, I hope, give us various foils by which to further assess other areas of discourse like ethics or aesthetics.

# Chapter 1

## Bullshit Taste Acquisitions and Reasoned Gustatory Disagreement

### 1.1 Introduction

If you are convinced that matters of gustatory taste are paradigm cases of the “merely subjective,” it is not likely that you will worry too much about understanding how we trade *reasons* for or against thinking something is, say, delicious. Or at least, you will not think we trade them in the way we would if, for example, we disagreed with someone about the effects of zinc lozenges on the duration of symptoms for the common cold. If there even are any “gustatory reasons,” you might think, they must have something to do with one’s “gustatory likes” or dislikes, or one’s dispositions to enjoy this or that kind of food. What is more likely to worry you is the seeming appearance of “genuine” disagreement in taste discourse. If matters of taste are paradigmatically subjective, it is odd that we seem to disagree about them almost as if we were disagreeing about matters like the effects of those zinc lozenges—as if there were an objective truth of the matter. With this worry in mind, you might then try to figure out how to explain (away) such an appearance of “genuine” disagreement.

But you should worry about gustatory reasons as well, for there is an even more surprising appearance: not just that we have genuine disagreements about matters of taste, but also that in so disagreeing, we trade what I will call “*distinctively* gustatory reasons”—reasons that seem to have not much to do with our likes or dislikes, even our “gustatory” ones, or our dispositions to enjoy or experience gustatory pleasure. Furthermore, this appearance of “operating with” distinctively gustatory reasons is not limited to our actual disputes. We seem to appeal to or at least respect the existence of such reasons when we “acquire a taste” for something—when we (sometimes consciously or purposefully) form our gustatory likes and dislikes. We even have a relatively cohesive practice by which we “mark” some of those acquisitions by evaluating them as being (or not being) in accord with what we consider to be distinctively gustatory reasons; we “call bullshit” on people’s tastes and acquisitions of

taste. All this is what I will be arguing in this chapter.

I will first lay out the phenomena of acquiring tastes in accord with our reasons and of evaluating such acquisitions, and I will defend the above description of them by distinguishing them from other phenomena that might be thought not to have much to do with “distinctively” gustatory reasons. I will then suggest some ways in which distinctively gustatory reasons seem to make an appearance during our taste disputes as well. However, I will do the latter only negatively, by arguing that there is something missing in two attempts to motivate certain forms of subjectivism about matters of taste. The first motivation analogizes predicates of taste with “contextualist”-friendly predicates like “flat,” and the second more straightforwardly investigates the central “point and purpose” of taste disputes. Finally, I will draw out one implication of a shift in focus from figuring out how to account for the “genuineness” of taste disagreement to figuring out how best to understand gustatory reasons: contemporary “contextualist” and “relativist” semantic accounts of taste predicates, typically thought to be rivals, actually share a theoretical burden. They both need to make sense of the appearance of “distinctively” gustatory reasons consistently with a feature they share: the relativization of the truth of assertions and judgments of matters of taste to substantive subjective factors such as our “likes,” which pushes us to think that the reasons here must be essentially “sourced in” those subjective factors.

## 1.2 An Appeal to Non-Bullshit Taste Acquisitions

Over time, you may have acquired a taste for a few things that you did not naturally find delicious when you first tasted them. For example: wine, whiskey, stinky cheese, bitter melon, offal, oysters, blood sausage, fish sauce, sashimi, durian and chicken claws. Sometimes you suddenly and without much awareness acquire a taste for something—it just happens. Sometimes, however, you consciously or purposefully acquire a taste for something. You embark on a project—perhaps not too important, compared to the rest of your life’s projects, but a project nevertheless—to appreciate and enjoy something that you currently do not (fully) appreciate and enjoy. You can embark on such a project for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they are purely practical: for example, you acquire a taste of wine to impress a date. When we say that such a reason is “purely practical,” we of course do not mean merely that it is a practical reason—every reason to embark on a project is a practical reason. We mean rather that such a practical reason contrasts with “purer” practical reasons one might have for embarking on this kind of project. One such “purer” reason is this: to get yourself to appreciate and enjoy what is actually there to appreciate and enjoy.

Here is an extreme example of this. Suppose you come to think that you only hate olives because your mother drank too many olive martinis when you were a child, to disastrous consequences for your appreciation of olives. But all your friends tell you that olives can be delicious, and in the rare moments you do not have vivid re-imaginings of your mother shattering martini glasses near your head, you do not feel that they taste really terrible, despite what you tend to proclaim to your friends. When you are being honest, you have to

admit that you have tasted worst things before—rotten milk, for instance. So you decide to conquer your emotional baggage and develop a taste for olives, or at least, develop whatever taste for olives you think you should develop: whatever would be proportionate to how good olives actually are, independently of your nightmarish recollections of your past. In such a case, your primary aim in embarking on such a project is to get yourself to appreciate and enjoy what is actually there to appreciate and enjoy; the fact that you are aiming at what is *actually there* to be appreciated is emphasized in the above story because of the clear *bias* you have that is caused by your traumatic recollections of glasses containing olive martinis.

There are some complications. You may, of course, fail your project. You may realize that nothing you do will change the way you feel about olives. However, that is no bar to thinking that you are capable of embarking (and that we sometimes do embark) on such a project.<sup>1</sup> And of course, there are plenty of cases not like the one above where it is less clear whether you are acquiring a taste for something for “purer” reasons, or for just the “merely practical” ones (which I will from now on call “ulterior” reasons or motives). Many an acquisition of the taste for wine are like this. You begin the project of getting yourself to appreciate and enjoy wine hoping to impress a date; eventually you grow out of your silliness, but the project does not go away—it merely transforms into one whereby you hope to see what is there to be appreciated and enjoyed in wine. Or maybe it is not entirely clear you have outgrown such silliness. Maybe you have only replaced it with a more sophisticated form, by hoping to impress the partners at your law firm, say (and knowing you will not impress them by merely having come to enjoy wine for *obvious* ulterior reasons). So sometimes we have to look carefully at the overarching narrative of a project to see whether it is “embarked on” for ulterior reasons or not; and sometimes it is not clear. However, this does not mean that we never embark on such projects for non-ulterior reasons. Finally, often going about trying to *succeed* in such projects will involve some form of “faking it till you make it.” Some of that faking will probably occur in front of others; to that extent, you may end up faking it to others—it is difficult to avoid. But such faking is a mere means to the goal and will occur whatever the reason to reach the goal is: whether, that is, it is to see what is there to be appreciated, or it is for ulterior motives. In other words, even in aiming to appreciate what is there to be appreciated, we may have to pretend as much as possible before we can come to see or experience in the right kinds of ways. In doing so, we are still attempting to gain access to an item’s deliciousness; it is just that such access requires us to jump through hoops, as access is wont to do.

None of these complications takes away from the seeming difference between acquiring a taste for something because one hopes to see what is there to be appreciated and enjoyed; and acquiring a taste for something because of ulterior motives. The former project is a “distinctively gustatory project”—it is one that is based on the overarching desire to appreciate what is there to be gustatorily appreciated. The aim to enjoy what is, say, delicious, is

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<sup>1</sup>There is also no bar to you saying in such contexts of failure (or even just in the middle of an unfinished project), “Olives (probably) are good, but I just can’t bring myself to like them”; but more on the supposed oddity of this assertion in Chapter 2.



clearly a *gustatory* one; contrast this with the aim to impress your date. To appreciate what is there to be appreciated, we must also learn to judge that this or that is worth appreciating, and so we need to figure out which considerations favor our so judging or favor there being something to be appreciated; these considerations we might call “distinctively gustatory reasons.” Again, reasons which point to something’s deliciousness are clearly gustatory ones; contrast this with reasons which point to something’s being able to impress your date if consumed.<sup>2</sup> I will return to what I have called “ulterior motives”; they turn out to mesh well with many subjectivist conceptions of gustatory reasons, so that the contrast between such motives and our “purer” ones will be telling against a subjectivist who seems to need to insist that none of our motives are “pure.”

My claim so far has been that we sometimes take on distinctively gustatory projects that attempt to gain access to distinctively gustatory reasons.<sup>3</sup> I have based this claim on a few examples and some, I hope, commonsensical observations. Approaching the issue more theoretically, one might notice that this phenomenon of acquiring a taste for some food item belongs under a broader class of phenomena in which people change their preferences. Some people deny that we can have reasons, independent of our desires, for our desires. Such people will probably also deny that we can have desire-independent reasons for dropping or forming preferences. Interestingly, however, it has also been noted that when it comes to the acquisitions of preferences, we do something that looks awfully like *evaluating* such acquisitions. The particular phenomenon of “adaptive preference formation” (a paradigm case of which is “sour grapes”) illustrates this. We evaluate “sour grapes” preference changes as somehow bad. Much of the literature on “sour grapes” preference change revolves around trying to account for the difference between certain kinds of “character planning” or “intentional acquisition of mental states” that does not seem to be *faulty* in the way that “sour grapes” change is. Several otherwise competing accounts of this distinction appeal to how *justifiable* the formation of the preference might be.<sup>4</sup> Notice that this appeal is an appeal to *evaluations* of such formations. If we find such evaluations in practice, that may give us some reason to think that there really is this difference between the “bad” and “good” cases of preference change. With this in mind, what I want to do next, beyond just characterizing acquisitions of taste as (sometimes) being projects that seek to access distinctively gustatory reasons, is to appeal to a “second-order” appearance of such reasons, exactly at the level of how we evaluate acquisitions of taste. Considering our “evaluative attitudes” allows us to see that we evaluate acquisitions of taste in accordance with whether acquirers take distinctively gustatory reasons into account. I think this adds to the initial plausibility of thinking there are such reasons, especially since I also think the attitude in question is a “thick” attitude, in the following sense: it is not a “thin” attitude theoretically constructed *just* to mark out

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<sup>2</sup>We do not, I hope, need a completely general account of ‘reasons’ in order to do philosophical work here. In particular, I will be, as I already have been, cagey about whether reasons are facts, propositions, beliefs, or what not.

<sup>3</sup>I am not denying, of course, that when we embark on such projects, we aim to gain access to other things besides the reasons.

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., (Bovens, 1995; Bruckner, 2009; Dorsey, 2010; Rickard, 1995).

the acquisitions of taste that aim to access distinctively gustatory reasons and the ones that do not.

The basic idea is this: when it comes to the acquisition of taste, we evaluatively mark a difference between having or concerning ourselves with distinctively gustatory reasons for acquiring a taste for something, and doing so only for other, ulterior reasons. That idea is based on this “thick” intuition: we “call bullshit” on certain acquisitions of taste. Sometimes when we acquire a taste for something, we are doing something that is bullshit. Other times we are not. In the rest of this section, I will delve into the details of such cases and suggest that they call for appeal to distinctively gustatory reasons. In the next section, I will deal with an objection against my description of the cases that suggests that they do not presuppose distinctively gustatory reasons.

Consider the following examples. I have acquired a taste for music. For a good portion of my life, I had nearly no musical life whatsoever. I could barely tell one song from another, no matter how classic or popular, and I didn’t particularly care. I couldn’t remember or carry a tune, and didn’t have any kind of favorite music. I didn’t hate listening to music, but I also derived little pleasure from it. Slowly, motivated by serious social embarrassment but also by a sense that there was something tragic about this lack, and with some mild self-discipline, I have come to better appreciate this really basic form of human life. Unlike before, I now actually sometimes want to listen to music. I still can’t carry a tune, but I toy around on a piano sometimes, and I now definitely prefer, say, listening to the music at a ballet over listening to teen pop on the radio over listening to a hair dryer blowing.

Compare my actual case with another imagined, but realistic enough case. Joe is a 24-year-old hipster living in a gentrifying arts district of Oakland, California. Skinny jeans, a fixed-gear bike, and a messy mop of hair are just not cutting it for his image (or his image of his image?). Joe decides that he will become an early proponent of a recent subcultural event being whispered about in the scene: “concerts” involving the careful juxtaposition of “epic doom-metal” (which Wikipedia says is like “doom metal,” except with “operatic and choral singing”), “lowercase” (a form of “ambient minimalism”—silence occasionally interrupted by barely audible noise), and “bitpop” (a type of electronic music made using 8-bit computers or video game consoles). Concert-goers sit on an empty white floor filled with large swaths of cotton and white Swiss balls, chanting Tibetan mantras from prescribed scripts.<sup>5</sup> Joe goes to these events and quickly learns the “lingo,” professing and explaining to anyone within earshot his newfound love for this musical experience.

What are we to say about Joe’s transformation? I call bullshit. At first, we may doubt that Joe really likes bitpop juxtaposed with epic doom-metal. This may bring us to evaluate him negatively. But that is not the only reason to hesitate. For suppose Joe

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<sup>5</sup>If you don’t believe this is realistic, consider a recent advertisement I saw in a hip Berkeley coffee shop for a “chamber hip-hop opera,” described as an “awesome fusion of hip-hop, classical, modern dance and Taoist mythology.” If you don’t think analogies might exist between this and food, consider the fact that the coffee shop uses individual gram scales by which to weigh the *exact* proportions for your dripped “third-wave” coffee. More “traditional” roasters tend towards thinking third-wavers are...you guessed it, full of it. (East Bay Express, 2009)

is in fact downright enthusiastic about the concerts. Still, his acquisition of this new taste is unfounded, unreasoned or in some sense or another faulty. I, on the other hand, have acquired a mild taste for a handful of decent songs and some classical music. Also, when I engaged in, and finally found my way into, the “lingo” of music appreciation, I did it (and still do it) in a very naive and simple-minded way, but my acquisition of this taste is nevertheless—pardon my immodesty—not unfounded, unreasoned or in some prominent way faulty (except in its being still an undeveloped, crude taste).

It is clear that there is a whole host of considerations that may come into play in assessing one person’s acquisition of a taste as in some way “faulty” or not. For instance, perhaps Joe is criticizable for not being loyal (enough) to his own preferences. He may furthermore not be aware of his own motivations, and thus be in some way self-deceived. In addition to not being loyal to his own preferences, he may be abiding by “external” pressures that are not reflective of his (considered) values, or are just not reflective of good values. If Joe is a “consumer of hip,” he may be playing a hopeless negative sum collective game.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps any or all of these faults may be described as “being inauthentic.” I will discuss this dimension of fault in more detail below. For now, we can note that some of these dimensions of fault can be stipulated away: perhaps Joe is quite self-aware and is not self-deceived (it would not be unheard of if it turned out he was only doing all of this “ironically”); perhaps this particular change in taste is one that follows many like it, so that he is in some clear sense being “loyal enough” to his own preferences (he has been at it so long that he really does like this *general sort* of stuff). So we need not think of Joe as being, in the above sense, “inauthentic.” Yet a dimension of fault remains and shines through: Joe does not care about having appropriately good reasons to like what he does. I do *not* mean that he has no good reason to acquire the liking. Perhaps Oakland is a town whereby you die of social strangulation if you do not live according to the relevant external pressures, or the secret police “suggested” that he “fall in line.” Joe can have good reason to immerse himself in the concerts, etc. Still, he has no *distinctively musical* reasons he cares about accessing or respecting or being guided by *as* he (with good reason) acquires his new taste. Turn on your bullshit detectors, and you will see that much of what strikes us as in some way faulty about the way in which he proceeds is that it points to this lack of concern for distinctively musical reasons. This lack is *central* to bullshit.

Obviously, I am not inventing the concept of bullshit. We already know what bullshit is, roughly. When it comes to assertions of straightforward matters of fact, bullshit traffics in the lack of care for the truth of the relevant assertions, and hence a lack of care for reasons pointing to or away from those truths.<sup>7</sup> When it comes to the acquisition of musical tastes, bullshit operates similarly: it traffics in the lack of care for the relevant musical truths, and so for the relevant musical reasons.<sup>8</sup> I will not give necessary and sufficient conditions for a

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<sup>6</sup>See (Heath, 2001).

<sup>7</sup>See (Frankfurt, 2005).

<sup>8</sup>The connection between bullshit and acquired taste is explored by Melchionne (2007). Melchionne, however, revolves his discussion around his claim that taste is “the truth about what pleases us” and is “about our responses,” and so he has to extend the account of bullshit to claim that bullshit acquired taste

bullshit acquisition of taste, but I will characterize it and signs of it.

What are we calling “bullshit?” Commonly we call the agent a “bullshitter” and the process by which he produces the product (“bullshit”), “bullshitting.” But the acquirer of the taste need not be a typical bullshitter, though in many cases he will be one and will engage in bullshitting, producing bullshit—as when he “learns the lingo” and actually engages others in it, in a way that I think we can all recognize. I am using the term in a way that is a bit more extended. I want to call the *acquisition* of the taste itself bullshit, in the sense that the acquisition “involves” the lack of concern with truth that is also involved when a bullshitter does his deed.<sup>9</sup>

What does it look like to lack this kind of concern as one acquires the taste? The process of acquiring a gustatory taste in a non-bullshit kind of way is a process that moves from not having access to something’s deliciousness to having access to it. The things we do when we acquire a taste—repetitively tasting something, doing so in various ways, in comparison with various things, while keeping in mind certain analogies, and so on—are things we do with the primary purpose of trying to access the item’s deliciousness. This does not typically happen in cases of bullshit taste acquisition. Instead, we repetitively taste, in various ways, primarily for ulterior purposes—to gain approval, to think highly of ourselves, and so on. Often such bullshit acquisitions will result in liking things that are not worth liking, but they need not. As I already noted earlier, sometimes we embark on an attempt to change our likes for ulterior purposes but incidentally come to appreciate what is genuinely an item’s deliciousness. Need *this* be a case of bullshit?<sup>10</sup> No. Exhibiting the appropriate concern need not require that one have *no* ulterior purposes in engaging in the various activities involved in the process of acquisition.<sup>11</sup> However, it also seems to me that you do not *have* to have ulterior purposes, even in the beginning—you can very deliberately try to appreciate some item of food you are convinced is delicious without having any purpose other than trying to gain access to its relevant features.<sup>12</sup> But if we are *primarily* concerned with impressing friends (and so on) to the detriment of actually caring to *craft* our tastes to *fit* features we

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exhibits a lack of concern not so much with truth, but with our own responses. So, according to Melchionne, the kind of bullshit involved in acquiring tastes in the way “culture victims” do is a matter of certain kind of “inauthenticity.” I think this simply confuses bullshit with authenticity. More on this below.

<sup>9</sup>I may not really be extending the term. After all, when someone tells me that health care has been watered down to the point of passing, I might comment, “That’s such bullshit,” without meaning to comment on the message or the messenger. It is rather that I am thinking that the *watering down* of the health care bill is such bullshit. Also, we can use “bullshit” as an adjective: “the bullshit acquisition.”

<sup>10</sup>The question here is how to draw the line between genuine appreciation and bullshit appreciation that happens to be of something genuine. It parallels a worry Frankfurt tries to address. The worry is that thinking of bullshit as largely a matter of the asserter’s frame of mind may allow for forms of bullshit that happen to be true. Frankfurt argues that this allowance is correct. For criticism of this allowance, see (Cohen, 2002).

<sup>11</sup>Also, as I already noted earlier, mere pretending *during* the project is no sign of foul play. Acting *as if* you like something is an important aspect to *succeeding* at acquiring a taste.

<sup>12</sup>It may seem suspicious that you are convinced that it is delicious without yet liking it, but this suspicion probably misconstrues the importance of personal experience to judging matters of taste. I will have more to say about this importance in Chapter 2.

genuinely respond to in the relevant items, that is a sign we are doing something that is bullshit, and it does not matter so much whether you happen to end up liking something worth liking. If you wouldn't care one way or another if God had simply struck you with the new taste independently of you actually forming it by recognizing and experiencing the relevant features, then your acquisition was probably bullshit.

Another sign of bullshit resides in what we tend to do once we have acquired the taste. If the resulting way we engage with others in giving and receiving reasons for thinking something is delicious exhibits a lack of concern with the truth, then that is a sign our acquisition was bullshit. That is, if we have to bullshit afterwards, the acquisition was probably full of it, too. This can be seen via our example of Joe. For notice that Joe probably needs to have the *semblance* of having distinctively musical reasons in order to effectively come off as someone who loves this stuff *for the right reasons*. Why is this? He needs to be able to recite the right kinds of considerations to the right people—to “learn the lingo,” as I put it. If he makes it explicit that the reasons he cares about are only considerations in favor of thinking, for instance, that this concert is the concert that will impress his hip date, those “in the know” (whether they themselves are engaged in bullshit or not) will laugh him off.<sup>13</sup> To be a good bullshitter in this realm, he has to make an appearance of trafficking in the appropriate kinds of reasons. But it is a mere appearance, which is why we call bullshit.<sup>14</sup> He would not be dissembling (and would not need to dissemble) if he had been appropriately struck by the reasons as he was acquiring the taste. This sign of a bullshit acquisition nicely points out what seems to be the proper characterization of *what* the bullshitter is “faking”: he is faking having accessed distinctively musical reasons, as is clear from his trying to cite them when he continues his fakery in discourse.

So, first of all, we judge that Joe's reasons for doing what he did—take the steps to bring himself to like this stuff—are not really a part of a distinctively musical project, and are not primarily concerned with accessing distinctively musical reasons. They are rather “ulterior” reasons, ones which then cause Joe to be concerned with seemingly non-gustatory

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<sup>13</sup>Imagine this movie scene: an aspiring associate at a firm sneaks a peek over at the other table, noticing the senior partner picking the grüner veltliner instead of the chardonnay; he orders the same, eavesdrops on the partner, and begins bullshitting to the colleagues at his table. The script should read: “Oh, yes, I just love the way veltliner is more [fill in the blank] than chardonnay,” and not: “Well, I just love drinking something that will impress the senior partner.”

One subjectivist-inspired worry here is that whatever fills in the blank in his citation of a reason may be thought to be a further evaluative term that is itself applicable only relative to some interest, purpose, or personal tastes. Even if so, nevertheless, he still needs to avoid speaking a further truth—that in applying the further evaluative term, he still only cares about reasons merely dependent on those interests, etc. The avoidance of that truth is where the “fakery” would then come in.

<sup>14</sup>It is important to contrast Joe's activity of merely trafficking in the reasons from that of trafficking in the mere appearance of reasons. Many of us end up trafficking in the mere appearance of reasons, despite our best intellectual efforts. An astrologer constantly does. On the view of bullshit I have been following (Frankfurt's), a very serious, sincere astrologer need not be bullshitting. He may be taken in by bullshit, and repeating bullshit, but he need not be himself bullshitting (an analogy: if you use me as a mere machine to pass along a false message, I am not falsely testifying—after all, telephones don't testify—I am passing on false testimony).

reasons, which are often reasons merely sourced in or based on his purposes or interests.<sup>15</sup> We positively judge someone who makes a sincere attempt to accord his musical tastes with (his view of or what he comes to see as) the distinctively musical reasons, and negatively judge someone who does not. Second of all, part of what it is to pretend correctly or effectively, in Joe's case, is the ability to talk as if he has distinctively musical reasons. One good way to fail to be a part of many in-crowds is for you to expose yourself as conforming to the in-crowd solely because you want to be in it.<sup>16</sup> We think of this pretend talk, however detached from the reality of Joe's actual reasons and the validity of the various musical judgments, as an attempt at showing oneself to genuinely care about latching onto distinctively musical reasons.

In the gustatory case, we can easily construct parallel examples so that, in one case, we find a taste to be acquired primarily as a result of a distinctively gustatory project aimed at appreciating something by accessing distinctively gustatory reasons, and in another, a taste to be acquired for ulterior reasons, and solely on the basis of reasons sourced in one's interests or purposes, or likes and dislikes. One acquirer, for instance, naturally develops a love for wine. Another acquirer forces himself to develop a liking for expensive wine so that he can more effectively woo business clients. Likewise, there is a difference between the diner who recognizes the delights of the effective new techniques at the molecular gastronomical heaven of El Bulli, and the diner who seeks out foam merely for the sake of newness; between the drinker who shuns most California merlot, finding it mostly unsubtle, and the drinker who shuns California merlot after watching the protagonist in a popular independent movie denigrate it; between the diner who actively seeks to push the boundaries of his or her tastes because variety is the spice of food life, and the so-called "deep-end" diner who seeks the exotic merely to be able to tell friends about eating cobra heart in Vietnam, or, worse, the "ethnic food lover" who seeks the ethnically exotic for the sake of exoticizing the ethnic; and so on.<sup>17</sup>

Let us look at one example in slightly more detail. Consider Barry Smith's description of how one comes to love wine. He describes a process whereby one starts because "it's alcohol and it gets you drunk"; one continues because of the "embarrassing pretensions of youth,"

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<sup>15</sup>I am not denying that it is possible that he is concerned with reasons which are (apparently) not so sourced, but which are *also* not gustatory—e.g., moral reasons. Consider the very religious, moralistic tasters who (unsuccessfully) refrain from fully enjoying Babette's sensuous meal in the movie, *Babette's Feast*.

<sup>16</sup>It also seems safe to say that if there is self-deception here, the fact that effective pretending involves suppressing any exhibition of "ulterior" reasons for the acquisition would probably play a role in the explanation of such self-deception. If Joe self-deceptively doesn't think of himself as acting based only on his concern for his image, even though he really is so acting, it is likely partially because he cannot publicly show that he is acting in this way, in the face of rejection by the relevant peers. It can require great psychological tenacity to think of yourself in one way while knowingly presenting yourself to others in a completely different way; self-deception may be easier.

<sup>17</sup>The underdescribed examples here only *tend* to be on one or the other side of the bullshit/non-bullshit divide. They await further description before final judgment. For instance, you may, in the process of exoticizing the ethnic, care deeply about crafting your tastes to features of what you taste that make for good reasons to think them delicious. You are then doing something that is morally suspect, but not gustatorily bullshit.

which caused one to have moments of “soi-distant sophistication when one turned one’s back on beer” and first dates “when one was nervously keen to impress the other party with one’s savoir-faire, desperately trying to remember one’s parent’s wine choices”; the pretensions of youth faded, we might continue our “student years” drinking “indifferent wines, mainly for the company and the conversation.” (Smith, 2009, p. 52) Then Smith discusses the event of arriving at an “epiphany,” whereby one comes to experience wine’s “greatness.” The epiphany is an “intensely hedonistic moment, an encounter with a fine and elegant thing.” You are “astonished that wine can reach such heights,” and you “want more opportunities to drink other wines as great as this because now you know great wines exist and that you are capable of responding to them.” (2009, p. 53) There are various ways of understanding the difference between the teenager and student, and the man who has had an epiphany. Applied to this example, my claim is that we do in fact evaluate the teenager and student’s acquisition of taste differently than we do the man’s acquisition of taste (and we do so even if *all* of them have *successfully* acquired a taste for wine, or even if the teenagers end up liking (what happen to be) “fine and elegant” wines). For instance, Smith variously describes (lightly, one gathers) the youths’ actions as embarrassing, pretentious, and desperate.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.3 Is It Bullshit or Something Else?

I have been making a somewhat baroque appeal to our evaluative judgments about acquisitions of taste. I think this appeal is to something that is not just constructed out of the theoretical belief that there are distinctively gustatory reasons—considerations in favor of something’s being delicious or thinking something delicious, tout court.<sup>19</sup> If this is true, then a worry is generated for those who think that *all* our gustatory reasons are really, at bottom, reasons having to do with the furthering of our purposes and interests, or which depend just on our personal tastes—reasons, that is, which are in some way essentially sourced in some kind of subjective factor. Call such a view “subjectivism” about gustatory reasons, and the denial of the existence of distinctively gustatory reasons a form of “skepticism” about them. My appeal to bullshit suggests a general tactic against the subjectivist/skeptic. Take your favorite account of taste reasons that are merely dependent on our interests, purposes, or what not, and plug it into our evaluative practice with regard to acquisitions of taste. Would we on occasion dismiss as bullshit taste acquisitions that concern themselves merely

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<sup>18</sup>A caveat: it seems inappropriate to negatively evaluate the students if they merely have “humble” tastes. One need not be engaging in bullshit if one comes to like wine for company and conversation. As I mentioned earlier, it is not that we need to have *no* ulterior goals in acquiring tastes in a non-bullshit way. The case is underdescribed. Must we only appreciate “fineness” and “elegance” in wine, and aren’t “humble” tastes enough to realize that there isn’t just red and white wine, that wine has finish, body, texture? An epiphany adds to appreciation; it is not required for genuine appreciation.

<sup>19</sup>Throughout the dissertation, I will call such considerations “distinctively gustatory reasons.” This choice of vocabulary should not be taken to suggest that it is *impossible* for a subjectivist to understand some reasons as gustatory as opposed to aesthetic, moral, etc. It is meant to suggest that it is more difficult for the subjectivist to do so, but nothing substantive rides on the choice of vocabulary.

(or too much) with those kinds of reasons? If so, your favorite account faces a difficult explanatory burden—for what is the account to say about the acquisitions that do not seem to concern themselves with those kinds of reasons, but with distinctively gustatory reasons? This strategy has obvious application to crude understandings of gustatory reasons as being dependent on purposes and interests. So, for example, consider tastes acquired just to impress our date, or to make sure we easily coordinate restaurant-choices in our relationships; these clearly fall on the “bullshit” side of the evaluative line, so it would be hard to maintain that all gustatory reasons were merely dependent on whatever reasons are relevant to the furthering of purposes such as impressing our dates, or interests such as having smooth relationships.

Consider a less crude subjectivist account of taste reasons, on which one’s gustatory reasons must be dependent on our likes, dispositions to like, idealized dispositions to like, or idealized dispositions for a member of a group to like. Such an account would still face a difficult explanatory burden. If the account does not just deny that we operate with the evaluative distinction that I have suggested we make, then it is faced with the question of why it is that we judge one kind of acquisition of taste as not properly concerned with gustatory reasons when *all* acquisitions of taste involve the development of certain *likes*. The basic idea behind the evaluative practice I have appealed to is that some ways of developing likes are gustatorily better than others. The basic idea behind the skeptical account of taste reasons as wholly dependent on our likes and dislikes is that there is no such thing as some likes being gustatorily better than others. These ideas do not mesh well together. A skeptical account of taste reasons as being instead based on dispositions to like or idealized dispositions to like fares no better on this score. For the dispositions and the idealizations cannot idealize along this dimension: that those disposed have access to distinctively gustatory reasons. For instance, an ideally disposed taster had better not be one who is in a position to adequately see the distinctively gustatory reasons and be disposed to be moved by them. To allow that would be to give up skepticism about distinctively gustatory reasons. But if the account does not give up the skepticism, then it faces the burden of explaining how some of those dispositions are gustatorily better than others.<sup>20</sup>

However, in the face of this kind of worry, skeptics about distinctively gustatory reasons will want to raise the following objection to my appeal to the evaluative distinction between bullshit and non-bullshit taste acquisitions. What if I have not, contrary to what I think, appealed to a distinctive evaluative judgment we make? What if I have been driven merely by a theoretical commitment to “distinctively gustatory reasons?” In particular, one might worry that I have conflated (supposed) bullshit taste acquisitions with some other evaluative judgment we make that does not presuppose or appeal to distinctively gustatory reasons. This is not just an abstract worry because there is in fact a concrete candidate for such conflation: the judgment of “inauthenticity.” I want to deal with this worry, not just to respond to subjectivism, but also to clarify the differences here between “bullshit” and

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<sup>20</sup>An appeal to a *group’s* likes will not easily fare better; we commonly call bullshit on those who merely follow a group’s likes when acquiring their own.



“inauthenticity.”

There are various ways of cashing out the notion of “inauthenticity.” The ways I will concern myself with here are ones which can be understood independently of distinctively gustatory reasons. One such way of cashing out ‘inauthenticity’ is along the dimension of fault we already noticed is sometimes ascribed to taste acquisitions: that of failing to be “loyal” to one’s own tastes. It cannot be the case that one can only be loyal by just sticking with whatever one likes, for then every case of a change in taste (and hence every case of taste acquisition) would be inauthentic, and that does not seem right. Perhaps being loyal to one’s tastes, then, involves some kind of similarity relation between the tastes one acquires and the tastes one has. However, as I suggested before, we can stipulate that someone like Joe acquires quite similar tastes to ones he had before; surely we would still evaluate his acquisition negatively.<sup>21</sup> If so, then the negative evaluation seems to involve more than just “inauthenticity” in this sense. Furthermore, “similarity” itself needs to be understood independently of there being distinctively musical reasons that Joe is trying to track across his various similar acquisitions.

A similar problem holds for the attempt to accuse Joe of having inauthentic tastes not because they are too dissimilar from ones before, but because they are too “arbitrary.” Maybe one day Joe is into Japanese tea ceremonies, the next day sports cars, the next video installation art, and finally, today, his bitpop concerts.<sup>22</sup> These changes may look “hasty.” But again, we can easily imagine Joe not to have changed his tastes that much and not to have wildly unstable tastes, while still judging his acquisition to be bullshit. And ‘arbitrary’ still needs to be explained independently of the notion of distinctively musical reasons.

Another suggestion in the vicinity is that Joe is too much of a “conformist,” too deferential to the crowd. The response to this suggestion is the same: imagine bullshitting Joe is in fact not a conformist (on the contrary, he is on the cutting-edge of Oakland-cool, and to be there, you had better not be like everyone else trying to be cool).<sup>23</sup>

There is a more plausible tactic to cashing out the notion of ‘inauthenticity’: one is inauthentic when one does not “ground” one’s acquisitions of tastes in one’s own responses to items tasted—one’s own gustatory (or aesthetic) *experiences*.<sup>24</sup> With this picture of authenticity in play, someone may worry that the distinction I appealed to above—that between a certain kind of caring for distinctively gustatory reasons and a certain lack of

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<sup>21</sup>In fact, “he’s always had tastes like this” can be grounds for even further condemnation if we think he has always acquired the tastes he has had in the way he is doing now.

<sup>22</sup>This example is modified from one in (Melchionne, 2007). There Melchionne points out that abiding by “extrinsic” motivations for acquiring tastes has the danger of resulting in changes “snowballing through my preferences” and my open-mindedness to new things becoming a form of “sycophancy.”

<sup>23</sup>Perhaps he is conforming to the culture of coolness? What is bad about that cannot be merely that you are falling in line (imagine falling in line with a bunch of people you genuinely think are right because you also have seen, for yourself, the way they are right). It must rather be that this particular kind of falling in line is bad. But why? A natural answer is: because doing it this way just is an instance of not caring about distinctively gustatory reasons.

<sup>24</sup>Instead of, say, in the authority of the crowd. Perhaps this is the proper way of understanding ‘conformism.’

caring for them—should be replaced with a distinction between a person who acquires a taste based on her own gustatory experiences and one who acquires a taste based on “ulterior” reasons. On such an account, then, a person acquiring a taste is not trying to gain access to features of the items tasted that make it delicious. Rather, the person just seeks to *have* certain kinds of experiences of, say, “gustatory pleasure,” or at least come to be able to have them in response to the relevant items, and once he does so, he so to speak *creates* a “gustatory reason.” This account seems to be in accord with skepticism about distinctively gustatory reasons. For “gustatory reasons” so construed are merely based on or sourced in one’s likes. On top of this worry, someone might try to co-opt my vocabulary of “bullshit” by insisting that what is *really* bullshit about, say, Joe’s acquisition is not that he lacked a certain kind of care for distinctively musical reasons, but rather exactly that he lacked a certain kind of care for his own musical experiences. In fact, this is exactly how Melchionne understands “bullshit” aesthetic taste:

In bullshit or counterfeit taste, we mainly deceive ourselves. The disregard for truth is a disregard for the truth about our own responses to works of art or other objects that we approach aesthetically. When taste is inauthentic, we are unconcerned with what we really like, remaining satisfied with the impression or performance of liking things.<sup>25</sup>

One question that arises for such an account is what it could mean for someone to not be “true to his own responses” and to “remain satisfied with the impression of liking things” rather than going by what he “really” likes. After all, Joe *successfully* acquires the taste for those Oakland concerts, and for just that reason we would say that he really does like them. Again, stipulate that Joe is downright enthusiastic about those concerts, and you will still sense that Joe’s acquisition of taste is faulty. Furthermore, though there is a sense in which Joe is merely “performing,” this is plausibly because Joe acts (or has the disposition to act) as if he had the right kinds of reasons, sound as if he knew what he was talking about, and so on. But this is hardly a performance of *liking*.

From the rest of his article, it is clear that Melchionne means to suggest that when we acquire taste, we often *act as if* we like something, and that is the source of inauthenticity.<sup>26</sup> He also points out that acquired taste is a matter of “deciding” to change facts about our

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<sup>25</sup>The quote is taken from (Melchionne, 2007), which is published without page numbers. I think this is at best an extension of Frankfurt’s concept of ‘bullshit’—it is critical to paradigm cases of bullshit that there is a lack of concern for what’s actually so, independently of one’s own personal concerns. I think Melchionne thus conflates bullshit with authenticity, but I will not pursue the point, since it brackets the possibility that a more adequate concept of ‘authenticity’ is an older one that, as Guignon (2008, p. 279) explains, involves an “ideal of being true to oneself...bound up with a concern to...the principles of rationality...or to some other transpersonal or transcendent source of direction.” If being authentic is concerning yourself with adhering to “transcendent” principles of rationality, authenticity may be closer to what I have been thinking of as not-bullshitting.

<sup>26</sup>This is in fact a strange way of talking, since it seems to require that we never actually acquire the taste until we have acquired it authentically. Ignoring this, I am here focusing on the thought that it is a certain form of *acting* that is generating inauthenticity.

responses rather than “discovering” facts about our responses. I agree that we often act as if we like something in order to come to like it, and that this process is important to many attempts to acquire taste. However, it is also true that we do not need to do such things to acquire a taste. Take Joe again. Might it not be the easiest thing in the world for him to “get used to” the new concerts? He may have been to many past events that required him to challenge his patience, and suppress his natural reactions against cacophony—might he not just blindly try these new concerts several times over, not *acting* at all? Each time, it gets less bad, until finally, he comes to like it—in Joe’s case, it will be the energy he gets from the crowd, the deep sense of profundity or edginess, and so on, that (primarily) explains his coming to like it. If there is something inauthentic about “acting as if” one likes something, it need not be present here. Nevertheless, Joe’s acquisition is still bullshit. And is it right to say that Joe has merely “decided” to change the facts? In a sense, yes, but in that sense, who does not “decide” such things in *changing* one’s tastes? If there is something wrong with deciding such things, then *all* acquisitions of taste are problematic. But my acquisition of basic music taste was not.

Let us try one more time. Melchionne ends up appealing to such facts as this:

In order to acquire taste, we have to make an effort to detach from our existing preferences and allow for the disruption of our satisfaction...Acquired tastes must be chosen. *If the choice is well founded*, the acquired taste is more likely to be successfully integrated into our overall taste and hence, authentic. (Melchionne, 2007, my italics)

The idea here is that authentic acquired tastes are not just decided upon but decided upon in a “well-founded” way. To maintain skepticism about distinctively gustatory (or aesthetic) reasons, this appeal to “well-foundedness” had better not be an appeal to what is being denied exists. But it seems to be. Consider Melchionne’s description of a particular case of authentic “reordering” of one’s beliefs and experiences about a painter. Melchionne claims that he is unmoved by Cezanne though he has attempted to be moved by him, and he knows the painter’s great place in modern art history. He imagines that, as a result, he adjusts his beliefs about the value of Cezanne—in so doing, he adopts an “alternative critical or historical point of view” in which the value of Cezanne or the narrative in which he is typically placed is “discounted.” This process strikes Melchionne as authentic because “it allows for [his] very real experience of Cezanne to be put in dialogue with my overall taste” and it “creates a better overall account of my responses.” The process he describes, however, looks just like a case of adjusting one’s belief that modern art history’s narrative is as compelling as it might seem, and so discounting Cezanne’s importance as described by such a narrative; this adjustment fits with his experience of Cezanne’s work as unmoving—unmoving *because* (as Melchionne claims) its depiction of light is de-emphasized in favor of formal structure and surface. It is difficult to see how *this* kind of attempt to adjust for “coherence” and *this* kind of “all-things-considered, deliberative process” is anything other than the process of reasoning about Cezanne’s greatness in a distinctively aesthetic way: considering the

distinctively aesthetic reasons that Melchionne cites (and experiences Cezanne’s work as exhibiting)—i.e., Cezanne’s over-emphasis on formal structure and surface—and believing accordingly about modern art history’s narrative. How are we any longer avoiding an appeal to distinctively aesthetic reasons?

Before I leave this attempt to appeal to inauthenticity instead of bullshit, let me make a final point about Joe’s case. In at least one sense, Joe can have a very “coherent” set of desires, intentions, actions, and beliefs. If it is not just his acquisition that is bullshit, but also how he “learns the lingo” and how he carries himself among the in-crowd, then his bullshitting about his newly acquired taste, to be successful, had better be relatively coherent. In the way I already described in the last section, he had better be able to fake it well. Bullshit has an uncanny ability to be coherent, for to serve a bullshitter’s typical (conscious or unconscious) purpose (i.e., getting away with not really knowing what you are talking about or what you’re doing), the bullshitter needs to appear coherent. None of this rules out bullshit’s involving a lack of concern for the relevant reasons.<sup>27</sup>

I will say no more about how we might resist the replacement or re-construal of bullshit taste acquisition. I do think that the skeptic’s final idea above—that taste judgments, and our evaluations of them, have some close connection with taster’s personal taste experiences—is still a compelling motivation for skepticism. In the next chapter, I will deal at more length with this motivation, and I will use some of the discussion above to deal with it. It strikes me as apt to think of this connection between gustatory judgment and gustatory experience as partially a matter of authenticity, but not as replacing or re-construing bullshit, but in *contrast* to (and sometimes in *conflict* with) bullshit. I will argue that thinking of the connection as a matter of authenticity (instead of as tracking the “epistemic basis” by which we make judgments) helps us resist its use in another kind of motivation for skepticism about distinctively gustatory reasons: the thought that there is something fishy about accepting gustatory testimony.

## 1.4 Standard and Non-Standard Contextualism

In raising the above worry against skepticism about gustatory reasons, I have appealed to a negative evaluative attitude. But this was inessential; what we appeal to need not be negative, nor need it even be an evaluative attitude. Suppose, for instance, you were the

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<sup>27</sup>Caveat: there may be self-deception going on in Joe’s case, and in that way Joe’s attitudes may lack coherency, but the kind of coherency they lack is that between two separately coherent but incompatible sets of attitudes—one whereby his real reasons mesh well with his actions and likes and such (because they *explain* them—his wanting to impress his friends explains the way he acts), and his professed reasons meshes well with his picture of himself as latched onto musical reasons. (N.B. That he has a *picture* of himself as tracking musical reasons does not mean he actually has the right kind of concern for them. If I were a self-deceived corporate advertiser, my having a picture of myself as tracking the truth and respecting the reasons does not entail that I have the proper kind of care.) In the description of such self-deception, there is already an implicit contrast between bullshit acquisitions (and the bullshitting afterwards) and non-bullshit acquisitions.

first to discover a great band (and you do so in a way that is not bullshit). You then feel a kind of *pride* about this. Furthermore, we judge you *positively* for “having a good eye (ear).” What do you feel pride about? What are we judging you well for? In answering these questions, we should plug in facts about your being a trend-setter, your achieving a certain social status, and so on, and then ask: is *that* the only kind of pride we sense here and is that all for which we could be judging you well? If not, then we can also appeal to a certain sense of pride we sometimes have to show that distinctively gustatory reasons seem to appear in our practice.

Another way we can find the appearance of such reasons is in our taste disputes. This is what I want to take up in the rest of this chapter, and it is here that contemporary semantic accounts of evaluative gustatory predicates (sometimes called “predicates of personal taste”) will begin to play a role in our discussion. If what I have been calling “distinctively gustatory reasons” really do show up in our taste disputes, then semanticists may want to focus not just on arguing about how best to understand the mere existence of taste disagreement, but rather on how best to understand one specific form of it: *reasoned* taste disagreement. I think our distinctively gustatory reasons do show up in taste disputes, and I will suggest that they do by laying out what I think is misleading about two ways of motivating a form of gustatory contextualism, a semantic account that has close affinities with subjectivism about matters of taste. This will show us both that the relevant reasons do appear in taste disputes and that a number of contemporary accounts of gustatory predicates do not pay close enough attention to this fact.

I will start by briefly laying out the semantic accounts whose motivations I will be exploring. What I will call “standard” contextualism about “delicious” has it that “X is delicious,” as used at context C, is true iff the proposition ‘X is delicious according to tastes of the user in C’ is true at the world of C. Consider the following (supposed) disagreement:

Keller: That tuna nigiri was delicious!

Ono: Blech! You’re wrong. That tuna nigiri was not delicious!

Standard contextualism is (sometimes said to be) an attempt to respect the purported intuition that both Keller and Ono are “correct” or “right” or “faultless” or “not making a mistake” in saying what they respectively say. The view respects this purported intuition rather bluntly: by making what each party says true, in his respective context.

What I will call “non-indexical contextualism” and what others have called “relativism” about “delicious” is a similar attempt to respect such an intuition, but it claims that the context-sensitivity of the truth of matters of taste is at a different level than that suggested by standard contextualism. Like standard contextualism, non-indexical contextualism has it that the truth of a sentence “X is delicious” varies with context by being true relative to the tastes of the user at that context. But it denies that users at differing contexts “say different things,” or express different propositions. So, according to such contextualism, “X is delicious,” as used at context C, is true iff the proposition ‘X is delicious’ is true at the world of C and the tastes of C, i.e., iff X is delicious at the world of C and according to

the tastes at C. Non-indexical contextualism is so-called because the context-sensitivity it subscribes to is unlike that found in the use of indexicals like “I.”<sup>28</sup>

There are numerous objections in the literature to contextualism. One objection to standard contextualism is that although it respects the purported “faultlessness” intuition, it does not respect the intuition that the two parties are really disagreeing, since it thinks of the parties as speaking past each other: one party says that the nigiri is delicious according to his tastes; and the other that it is not, according to the other’s tastes. Also, standard contextualism cannot easily make sense of Ono’s sensibly saying to Keller, “You’re wrong.” Presumably Ono understands Keller’s assertion and knows Keller *finds* the nigiri delicious, so it is hard to see why Ono would think Keller is wrong about the nigiri tasting good *according to Keller’s tastes*. Finally, standard contextualism seems to implausibly construe us as “talking about” our own tastes, as opposed to the food we taste, as if we merely report what we like and don’t like; this makes it mysterious why we do not instead assert, “I like the tuna nigiri” or “My tastes are such that I like the tuna nigiri.”

Non-indexical contextualism seems to fare better. Because it allows that the parties to the relevant disagreements express the same semantic content with their sentences, it more easily accommodates the fact that the parties seem to affirm and deny the same thing, that they are each in some sense “talking about” deliciousness and not themselves, and hence that they are not just talking past each other. Furthermore, it allows that one party may ascribe wrongness to the other exactly because he is “the same thing” the other affirms.

Still, it is not entirely clear that non-indexical contextualism allows for *genuine* taste disagreements. Though non-indexical contextualism has it that the two parties assert contradictory contents,<sup>29</sup> it is unclear whether this is sufficient for disagreement. It may be that the two assertions nevertheless “concern” completely different tastes.<sup>30</sup>

Though I think the standard objections to standard contextualism are forceful, I think it will be helpful to see that both standard and more sophisticated versions of contextualism share a feature that is dissatisfactory with respect to allowing for the *robust* kinds of disagreements we can have in taste discourse: both versions of contextualism restrict the kinds of reasons we can give and take when we disagree over matters of taste. So even if both forms of contextualism avoid the above objections, they still share a difficult explanatory burden they may not have the resources to meet (at least, as long as they remain semantic accounts that have close affinities with subjectivism about taste).

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<sup>28</sup>Some people have also called the position “relativism” because it relativizes the truth of propositions to more than worlds. The position thus has the burden of explaining what it means for a proposition to be “true for you, but not for me,” a classic burden of relativism. “Non-indexical contextualism” is the label used by MacFarlane (2005, 2009), who reserves the label “relativism” for his assessment-sensitive semantics, which is significantly more radical than non-indexical contextualism.

<sup>29</sup>That is, ‘This tuna nigiri is delicious’ and ‘This tuna nigiri is not delicious’ cannot both be true at the same circumstance of evaluation.

<sup>30</sup>For these issues, see (MacFarlane, 2007, draft). For other potential problems understanding disagreement on “relativized” semantic accounts, see (Wright, 2007; Franc en, forthcoming; Ross and Schroeder, draft).

## 1.5 Reasons to Think Something Delicious

It is not nonsense for people to engage in taste disagreements by citing distinctively gustatory reasons—considerations for and against something’s being, e.g., delicious. Because this is so, it is inappropriate to think of the semantics of gustatory predicates in a way that fails to allow for the sensibility of such a practice. In particular, it is inappropriate to think that whether something’s being delicious is, as a matter of semantics, relative to purposes, interests, or tastes. Thinking so would require the kinds of reasons we cite in favor of something’s being delicious to be “sourced in” or “based on” or otherwise essentially dependent on purposes, interests, or tastes.<sup>31</sup> To see this, I will first consider a motivation for taste contextualism that takes some particular examples of taste disagreement and compares them to a paradigm case that motivates (or would motivate) standard contextualism. In doing so, I hope to suggest that the comparison is misleading in certain ways. I also think the worry that arises applies directly to non-indexical contextualism, and will argue that it does.

Let us first take a look at a disagreement concerning flatness:<sup>32</sup>

Beckham: That field is flat.

Ronaldo No, it’s not. The field ten kilometers away is flat. This one is way too bumpy.

Beckham: Trust me. This one is flat enough. We can play a pickup game here just fine. I’ve done it plenty of times.

Ronaldo You just don’t like driving so far to play. But when you see this other field, you’ll know I’m right. We can play here, but it just wouldn’t be as much fun because the ball bounces around too much. Anyway, what’s the matter? Afraid to test your skill against me on a real field?

Beckham: No. I’m just not so concerned about the field being *perfectly* flat! But have it your way. I want to make sure you don’t have any excuses about the field not being flat enough when I beat you. If it’s not flat enough for you, it’s not flat enough for me! Let’s go to the other one.

Now let us ask what kinds of reasons are given and taken in this “disagreement.” In the example above, it seems that Beckham and Ronaldo are figuring out whether the field is flat “enough.” Figuring such a thing out requires their agreement over what the purpose “at hand” is. The soccer players in our example are obviously in agreement about that—they are world-class players looking to play a casual pickup game. What they differ over seems to be whether, given such a purpose, the field closer to them is flat enough. And so they give and take reasons (crudely and maybe even implicitly) over whether their purpose is such that, e.g., the convenience of the closeness of the field will not outweigh the desirability of a field with the number of bumps that the further field has. The considerations that might

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<sup>31</sup>Even if gustatory reasons really are this way, we should not believe they are so on the basis of the semantics, since a plausible semantics should allow the sense of speaking otherwise.

<sup>32</sup>This kind of example is discussed in (Richard, 2008).

come into play here are various—perhaps their style of playing is such that being extremely flat is quite important to them even though they’re playing a casual game, or perhaps this time they want to play a “cruder” game than they typically do, so extreme flatness is not so important, and so on indefinitely.

The above disagreement over flatness may be aptly understood if we accept the idea that when we utter, “That field is flat,” we are really asserting that the field contains a number of bumps minimal enough for a given purpose. If this were true, then it would make sense that Ronaldo responds to Beckham by offering a reason for thinking that the field is not flat enough given their purpose of playing a casual game. Disagreements that arise over flatness are resolved by appeal to reasons as to whether the field really has a minimal number of bumps or whether the proposed “cut-off” point for a minimal number of bumps is really adequate for the purpose(s) at hand. (Disagreements can also be over what the purposes at hand *ought* to be, but more on this later.)

However, this structure of reason giving-and-taking in disagreements over matters of flatness, in which reasons are given about whether something is flat enough for a given purpose, is not typically found in disagreements over matters of taste. We can easily find a case of taste disagreement that makes this point vivid by just inserting into an example some explicit discussion about purposes.

Keller: That tuna nigiri was delicious!

Ono: Blech. That stuff is not delicious.

Keller: Well, it’s good enough for our party tonight.

Ono: So what? Do *you* think it’s delicious? People only like this stuff because it’s so fatty and buttery. They don’t appreciate any subtlety in nigiri at all! It’s ridiculous.

Keller: I think that’s too harsh. Maybe it’s not the greatest nigiri, but I didn’t mean that it’s only good enough to please the ignorant masses or something. It’s genuinely pretty tasty. The butteriness may not be the same as, say, the oily delicateness of mackerel, but it’s still delicious.

Ono: But the butteriness is just so in your face...

In this example, Ono explicitly sets it aside as *irrelevant* that the tuna nigiri is delicious enough to please the people at their party that night. And Keller makes it clear that when he said that the tuna nigiri is good enough for the party, he did not only mean that it is delicious enough for a particular purpose. He meant that the nigiri is pretty good, and he meant, presumably, to point out that the decent judges of deliciousness at their party would agree. Notice that it would be rather odd to do something similar when it comes to flatness disagreements:

Beckham: That field is flat.

Ronaldo: No, it’s not.

Beckham: Well, it’s flat enough for World Cup players to play on.

Ronaldo: So what? Do you really think it’s flat?



Beckham: Huh? We agree that it's got X numbers of bumps on it, right?

Ronaldo: Yes.

Beckham: So, for our purpose of playing soccer on a flat field, I think X number of bumps is good enough. Don't you?

Ronaldo: Yah, sure, for our purpose. But what I want to know is whether X number of bumps is *flat!* I know it's that many number of bumps, but what would people who are good judges of flatness say about whether it is flat?

The comparison is not made any more apt if we instead insist that matters of taste are relative not to purposes, but rather people's "tastes." For we can reconstruct the example to see that the structure of reason giving-and-taking still does not look like it would if matters of taste are somehow relative to people's tastes:

Keller: That tuna nigiri was delicious!

Ono: Blech. That stuff is not delicious.

Keller: Well, it'll be delicious to our party tonight.

Ono: So what? Do you really think it's delicious? People only like this stuff because it's so fatty and buttery. They don't appreciate any subtlety in nigiri at all!

Keller: I think that's too harsh. I didn't mean that it's only tastes good to the ignorant masses or something. It's genuinely pretty tasty. Butteriness may not be the same as oily delicateness, but it's still delicious.

Ono: But the butteriness is just so in your face...

Here Keller explicitly relativizes his judgment that the tuna nigiri is delicious to the people at the party, and Ono, much like before, responds by explicitly setting it aside as *irrelevant*.<sup>33</sup> And Keller again responds by noting that he didn't mean to say that it tastes good to people who have wildly different tastes than them. Rather, he meant, presumably, to point out that the decent judges of deliciousness at their party would agree with him.

Furthermore, if it is really purposes or tastes we need to make reference to in a taste disagreement, the reasons given and taken in a taste disagreement would look different, as we can see in the following odd-sounding examples:

Keller: This tuna nigiri is delicious.

Ono: No, it's not.

Keller: Why?

Ono: It would hardly please the people at our party tonight / feed the people there / look good enough as a table decoration / be pleasing enough to be worth the cost.

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<sup>33</sup>I am presuming that relativizing to people is a way of relativizing to their tastes.

Keller: I think they (have tastes such that they) would really like it / it would really fill them up / it would look amazing as a decoration / it is on sale.<sup>34</sup>

In these examples, Ono and Keller seem to be arguing about something that is beside the point—that is, they do not seem to be offering up the appropriate kinds of reasons for the dispute at hand. We expect instead considerations such as the tuna’s unsubtle butteriness not holding up compared to the delicate oiliness of mackerel.

Perhaps, however, the contextualist will insist that the examples above really sound odd only because *irrelevant* tastes are brought into the conversation. In the above examples, the relevant tastes were Keller’s and Ono’s, not the ones of the people at the party, the contextualist may insist. He will then see the above examples as ones on which Ono and Keller argue something that is besides the point because they are arguing over whether the tuna nigiri is delicious according to tastes that are *not* the ones relevant to the conversation (i.e. the party’s tastes rather than theirs).

Furthermore, with this in mind, the contextualist may then insist that a better analogy to draw between flatness-given-some-purpose and deliciousness-given-some-taste is one that makes use of the following kind of flatness disagreement, different than the one we started with:

Beckham: That field is flat.

Ronaldo: No, it’s not.

Beckham: Well, it’s flat enough for us to play on.

Ronaldo: No way. Do you want to play some amateur soccer or something? The ball will bounce all over the place.

Beckham: Yah, I suppose it will, but we’re just playing a pickup game. Relax!

Ronaldo: Sure, a pickup game, but not a pickup game among a bunch of amateurs. Come on. Don’t be so lazy. Let’s go to the further field. That one is actually flat.

Here, what is at issue is not whether, *given* some purpose, the field is flat enough. Instead, what is at issue is the very purpose at hand—whether it is the purpose *to* adopt in the present conversation. Parallel to this, the contextualist might point to the following example of taste disagreement, with tastes replacing purposes:

Keller: This tuna nigiri is delicious.

Ono: No, it’s not. So much butteriness in a fish is completely unsubtle and worse than more delicately oily fish.

Keller: Well, it’s delicious to me. To me, the butteriness is not that bad.

Ono: Oh, come on, eat more mackerel. It’s so much better!

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<sup>34</sup>Notice that it similarly sounds odd if we say in response to the question, “Why do you like the taste of artichokes?”: “Because liking them makes me look cool.” This is a mark of our evaluation of bullshit taste acquisitions.

In this example, the contextualist would then suggest, Ono is pushing his tastes onto Keller, much like Ronaldo is pushing his purposes onto Beckham. And this taste disagreement is exactly not one where we sense that tastes are being put aside as irrelevant to the issue at hand or that Ono and Keller are not arguing the issue at hand. Taste disagreement can “go” in the above way just fine, just as flatness disagreements can. So the comparison is apt.

However, the above two examples are not obviously parallel. It is, I suggest, misleading to assume that the move from purposes to tastes is barely a step. To see this, consider the following example of a flatness disagreement:

Beckham: That field is flat.

Ronaldo It’s flat to you, maybe. I prefer the further field. The ball doesn’t bounce as much.

Beckham: What? [Carefully eyeing the level of the field] Isn’t this flat to you?

Ronaldo No. Look at the bumps over there. I hate that area.

Beckham: [Rolling eyes] Okay, if it’s not flat to you, it’s not flat to me. Let’s go to the other one.

Ronaldino: [Jumping in] Wait, this is not flat to you guys?! Even the World Cup fields have bigger bumps than that!

Here we have what looks like a disagreement in which the purposes of the parties to the disagreement are *not* at issue, but where there is an explicit relativization to persons nevertheless. This conversation can be roughly “translated” in the following way:

Beckham: That field is flat.

Ronaldo That’s what you think, maybe. I prefer the further field. The ball doesn’t bounce as much.

Beckham: What? [Carefully eyeing the level of the field] You don’t think this is flat?

Ronaldo No. Look at the bumps over there. I hate that area.

Beckham: [Rolling eyes] Okay, if you don’t think it’s flat, I don’t think so either. Let’s go to the other one.

Ronaldino: [Jumping in] Wait, both of you don’t think it’s flat enough?! Even the World Cup fields have bigger bumps than that!

In other words, the explicit relativization to a person seems to operate differently than an explicit relativization to purposes, at least in the case of “flat.” But then it seems unmotivated to think the relativization to persons in talk of “delicious” is different, at least if one is thinking of flatness disputes as an appropriate model of disagreement.<sup>35</sup> We should roughly “translate” the above case of taste disagreement to this:

<sup>35</sup>The point here is just that saying that it is tasty to me can be like saying that it is a chair to me or red to me, the latter two sayings of which do not tempt anyone to think anything other than that I am (roughly) expressing my belief that it is a chair or it is red. But this is not to say there are no linguistic differences at all. (For discussion of this issue, see (Richard, 2008, pp. 140–145).)

Keller: This tuna nigiri is delicious.

Ono: No, it's not. So much butteriness in a fish is completely unsubtle and worse than more delicately oily fish.

Keller: Well, I think it's delicious. I don't think butteriness is that bad.

Ono: Oh, come on, try this mackerel. It's so much better!

Understood this way, the disagreement is not one in which Ono is pushing his tastes onto Keller; at least, not in the way Ronaldo earlier pushed his purposes onto Beckham. We might say that Ono is pushing a view rather than a viewpoint. The analogy with 'flatness for a given purpose' does not clearly hold up.

Notice that the above criticism goes through whether contextualism is construed standardly or "non-indexically." No matter how you relativize the truth of such judgments, you will end up with a picture of allowable reasons as needing to be based on or sourced in purposes or tastes, and this distorts how taste disagreements really "go." The fact that contextualism calls for only reasons based on purposes (or tastes) stems solely from the fact that it says *that* the truth of judgments of matters of taste are relativized to such purposes and not at all from what it says about *how* the truth is relativized. Reasons are considerations in favor of something's being so, or thinking something so. They are thus also considerations in favor of something's being true, or thinking something true. And if the truth of such things are relativized to some factors, then such considerations, I suggest, are in some intuitive sense dependent on those same factors. Could we suppose otherwise? If R is a reason for p, then R is a reason for p's being true, but what could the latter mean if truth is relativized, other than that R is a reason, relative to some purpose, tastes, etc.? There is just no such thing as R's being a reason for p's being true, *tout court*, since the truth of p is relativized to purposes or tastes.<sup>36</sup>

Notice also that my objection does not rest *merely* on the idea that we must be able to *say*, of the reasons we give and take during taste disagreements, that they are "reasons which are considerations in favor of something's being delicious." For both the standard and non-indexical contextualist can rig up a way to *call* the reasons given and taken, on their understanding of them, "considerations in favor of something's being delicious." The non-indexical contextualist would have an easier time doing so, since his view allows for the idea that the parties to the disagreement dispute over a single thing—the proposition that something is or is not delicious. So, for instance, the non-indexical contextualist could say that this fact by itself allows him to say that reasons are given for and against that very thing disputed. However, the standard contextualist could also insist that sometimes what it *is* for a consideration to be a consideration in favor of something's being delicious in the case of taste disagreements just is for it to be a consideration for and against some purposes or interests (or some such thing) being relevant or salient in the given context.<sup>37</sup> In other words,

<sup>36</sup>The contextualist may simply define a monadic truth predicate that is "unrelativized," in the sense that it is *implicitly* relativized. But such truth won't be a truth *tout court*—independently of a purpose.

<sup>37</sup>Other times, those reasons are just reasons for thinking that, given some purpose, something is delicious.

the standard contextualist could insist on a metaphysical view about the nature of gustatory reasons that earns him (theoretical) talk of “considerations in favor of something’s being delicious” (even: “tout court.”) This is to be “directly” skeptical of distinctively gustatory reasons, independently of investigating how taste disputes “go.” There *may* be reason to be directly skeptical, but pulling the above “re-labeling” moves would be just that: re-labeling what is at bottom dependent on purposes and such. My objection rests on the idea, not to be avoided by re-labeling, that we can make sense of reasons which are considerations in favor of something’s being delicious, tout court, *in contrast to* and not merely *defined in terms of* reasons dependent on purposes.

## 1.6 The Upshot of Taste Disagreement

I have been arguing against one of contextualism’s motivations by drawing disanalogies between “delicious” and a paradigmatically contextualist example, “flat.” But contextualists do not only motivate their views using paradigmatic examples. Many think that it is enough to see that taste disagreement is both “genuine” and “faultless.” If no clear sense is given to the notions of ‘genuineness’ and ‘faultlessness’ ahead of time, contextualists beg questions against both truth relativists and objectivists about “delicious.”<sup>38</sup> But perhaps a clearer sense can be given. An example of such an attempt is in (Egan, 2009). Egan argues that a certain characterization of the “worthwhileness” of taste dispute is best explained by a certain view of the *upshot* of taste disagreement (which is then, he claims, best explained by a (non-standard) contextualist semantics). The “central upshot” of taste disagreement, Egan claims, is to get each party to the disagreement to self-ascribe a dispositional property to the effect that he or she is (or is not) disposed to receive certain gustatory pleasures/pains from the thing tasted.<sup>39</sup> I want to consider Egan’s various desiderata for an account of the “special sort of defectiveness to which disputes about taste are subject” (2009, p. 258), independently of the bare idea that taste disagreements are “faultless.” When we do, we will see that there is little motivation to think taste disagreement has the “central upshot” Egan thinks it does.

Here is a summary of the facts that Egan considers to be worthy of the respect of any theory of the upshot of taste disagreement: (a) some taste disputes are worth pursuing, others not; (b) some of them are more worth pursuing with certain kinds of people—people who are similar to you—than others; (c) some may become not worthwhile if we learn that people we are disputing with are not similar to us; and (d) when the disputes are not worth pursuing, they are not worth pursuing for intuitively “deeper” reasons than, say, why it is not worth pursuing disputes about how many fleas are on a particular dog’s back. Egan also thinks it important to explain the fact that (e) taste disputes play a “major role” in

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<sup>38</sup>I take this issue up in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>39</sup>Egan is explicit about thinking that taste disagreement does not involve any “crucial evidence” and that the idea that there are “any objective facts in this domain” is “deeply suspect.” (Egan, 2009, p. 258) My point will be that his characterization of the data itself is infected by this thought.

“connection-building,” whereby “people discover commonalities in the sorts of things that they enjoy, appreciate, or despise” (2009, p. 260); (f) taste disputes are robust; and (g) we can improve our tastes by acquiring tastes.<sup>40</sup>

There seems to be a relatively straightforward account of all of (a)-(g): taste disputes are disputes over whether something is delicious, disputes that may not be worthwhile to engage in given the difficulty of trading reasons in order to come to agreement about whether something is delicious. To briefly illustrate this picture, consider just (f), the fact that taste disagreements are robust. Egan jumps through hoops accommodating this fact, but the straightforward account here allows that there is no in-principle bar (setting aside metaphysical prejudice) to thinking that taste disagreements are robust in the following kind of way. We trade reasons for or against thinking something’s delicious, and we disagree heartily about what it takes for something to be delicious. Furthermore, these disagreements can continue at length because it is very difficult not to beg questions against one another when we are involved in a taste dispute. Part of the reason for this is that, when it comes to taste, we have to separate out a lot of *non-objective* factors influencing and distorting people’s judgments. For instance, we have to rely on our sense of taste to judge matters of taste, and our sense of taste is heavily influenced by distorting cultural and biological factors. But because of the difficulty of recognizing such distorting factors, and because in many cases we cannot discount or change them, taste disagreement can be very non-worthwhile to engage in (and it can be so *exactly* in those instances where others do not share our tastes, since people who share tastes will more easily avoid begging questions against each other, and more likely to share the competencies required for understanding reasons being offered). All this looks like quite robust disagreement, and it also seems to account for facts (a)-(c). Furthermore, the difficulties involved in adjudicating evidence and reasons in matters of taste is intuitively a “deeper” difficulty than the difficulty of counting the hairs on a dog’s back, so the view also accounts for fact (d).<sup>41</sup> I will flesh out and qualify some of the above considerations about the “difficulty” of taste disagreement in Chapter 3, but already it is not at all obvious that taste disagreement requires as its “central upshot” the attempt to get others to predicate a property of being disposed to like something.<sup>42</sup>

When we examine Egan’s descriptions of taste disagreements—descriptions that are supposed to make his view intuitive—we find them incomplete. What is really driving Egan’s view about the central upshot of taste disagreement is not the goal of explaining the above desiderata, but the sense there can *only* be gustatory reasons based on our tastes, interests, and so on. For instance, at a crucial juncture, Egan gives the following example of how taste disagreement is supposed to go, on his account of its central upshot:

<sup>40</sup>Egan mentions one more desideratum, which is just that the taste disagreements really are taste disagreements—they exhibit what he calls “conflict.”

<sup>41</sup>And, as we have already seen, there is no bar to acquiring a taste for something that doesn’t seem to be delicious at first taste (fact (g)).

<sup>42</sup>Nothing I have said is incompatible with this being *an* upshot of taste disagreement. Compare: nothing about moral realism/cognitivism is incompatible with moral assertions having as *an* upshot the “expression” of non-cognitive attitudes.

Alan and Clare start off with a default presupposition that they are, in general, alike with respect to their dispositions to enjoy various foods. And so they presuppose that they are alike with respect to their disposition to enjoy Vegemite or not. Alan has good reason, based on his experiences with Vegemite, to believe that he is disposed to enjoy Vegemite. Presupposing that he and Clare are alike, and hoping to get her to recognize this similarity, he asserts “Vegemite is tasty.” In order to accept Alan’s assertion, Clare has to self-attribute *being disposed to enjoy Vegemite*...Clare has good reason, based on her experiences with Vegemite, to believe that she lacks this property. (Egan, 2009, p. 264)

According to Egan, Alan goes about asserting what he does by considering a reason to think that he likes Vegemite, and Clare reacts by considering her reason to think that she is not disposed to enjoy Vegemite. This description doesn’t ring quite false, but it does seem quite incomplete. For *nothing else* is mentioned as reasons for thinking the conflicting things Alan and Clare do. This is strikingly implausible. In a realistic case of taste disagreement, Alan would appeal to reasons such as this: Vegemite is a gooey mix of salty maltiness that is less intense than Marmite. Clare may, in response to this, consider reasons such as this: Vegemite is much too salty and its gooeyness has the texture of rubbery snot, which is clearly disgusting. These are reasons for or against the deliciousness of the Vegemite. Alan and Clare-like taste disagreeers centrally focus on the Vegemite; they do not centrally focus on whether, based on what each says, they have reason to think the other really has a disposition to like something. Why bother even *trying* Vegemite together if that were the central upshot of this taste disagreement?

Egan goes on:

One of two things could happen at this point: (i) She could take Alan’s assertion of “Vegemite is tasty” to be a sign that he’s never tried Vegemite, or that his experiences with it have always been in unusual circumstances, and he’s mistakenly concluded, based on a few fluke pleasant interactions with Vegemite, that he’s got a general disposition to enjoy the stuff. In this case, she’s likely to respond with “Vegemite is not tasty,” and attempt to get Alan to accept her assertion and self-attribute *not being disposed to enjoy Vegemite*... (ii) She could take Alan’s assertion of “Vegemite is tasty” to be good evidence that they are not, after all, alike with respect to their dispositions to enjoy Vegemite, and stop presupposing that they are. In that case, she’ll say something like, “maybe it’s tasty to you—I find it disgusting,” which will, probably, get Alan to accept that they’re not alike in the relevant respect, and end the dispute. (Egan, 2009, p. 264–265)

These continuations seem to me misleading. Clare can do any of the above, but she could easily and naturally also take Alan’s assertion to be a sign that he thinks Vegemite’s rubbery snot-texture is good, or that Vegemite is not too salty, or that Alan hasn’t really tasted how awful the maltiness is, or the peculiarly processed quality of its malty flavors, or any number

of things, any of which may result in her trying to convince Alan otherwise, or in giving up doing such a thing. While doing this, Clare would probably also be considering the various reasons she has for thinking Vegemite is not delicious, as well as reasons for thinking that Alan's professed reasons are no good, as well as what reasons Alan might actually have, professed or not. These are all reasons in favor of thinking something's delicious or not, tout court. If we sense that taste disagreeers *characteristically* engage in disagreement (if, that is, they seriously engage in it at all) in this way, then Egan's descriptions are distorted even before any explaining starts.

Another reason to think that Egan's descriptions are distorted is not just that they are missing certain kinds of reasons, but that the reasons they cite are thought of in a distorted way. So, for instance, Egan speaks as if Clare or Alan's reasons for thinking they share dispositions are by themselves enough to give them reasons to continue a dispute. He also supposes that if Clare finally tries Vegemite "spread to the correct thickness on the right sort of cheese," she might be directly convinced that she "really is disposed to enjoy Vegemite." (2009, p. 265) But this does not seem to describe the reasons with the right kind of tenor. Intuitively, Clare's reason to think that they share a disposition *interacts* with other reasons—considerations, for instance, as to whether it is worth trying to convince someone who does not share the disposition that something is delicious. How? Presumably Clare would judge how prudent or possible it would be to get the other to see Vegemite's deliciousness by citing convincing gustatory reasons. Furthermore, if Clare really tries Vegemite spread to the *correct* thickness on the *right* sort of cheese, then she may be convinced she enjoys (or is disposed to enjoy) Vegemite, but presumably this is *because* Vegemite is delicious. If asked why she enjoys Vegemite, she would presumably cite some feature of it that makes it delicious: its malty saltiness, say. In other words, Egan's cited reasons only make sense, or have their force, *given* Alan and Clare's reasons for thinking that Vegemite is or is not delicious.

Another example of this kind of distortion is in Egan's attempt to allow for more "robust" taste disputes.<sup>43</sup> He suggests two general strategies. The first is to make the dispositional property more robust: e.g., *being a member of a group whose typical members, in ideal conditions, have gustatory capacities and sentiments that are robustly disposed to interact with the item tasted in a way that produces intrinsically desirable gustatory experiences*.<sup>44</sup> The second is to weaken the requirement that disputants have decent reason to presuppose similarity. Although Egan stretches to account for the robustness of taste disagreement,

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<sup>43</sup>Egan tries to make disputes more robust because he wants to address worries that his account predicts that our disputes fizzle out quickly; after all, "you are in a better position to know what kinds of responses you get from broccoli than I am." (2009, p. 267)

<sup>44</sup>One characteristic problem with broadly dispositional views like Egan's is that, to make the views extensionally adequate, one has to describe the responses in question as "gustatory" (and perhaps, "intrinsically desirable"—though it seems to me that there are plenty of gustatory experiences that track deliciousness that are not "intrinsically" desirable, like certain kinds of experiences of spiciness), but then one is faced with the difficult question of how to class together all the variety of experiences we have when we have good gustatory ones, without appealing to distinctively gustatory reasons, gustatory facts, and so on.



he does not consider the possibility that it is the *kind* of robustness that may be at issue. Egan's moves to accommodate robustness appeal only to the fact that we can trade reasons which are dependent on our purposes and interests, including our interests in finding friends and arguing "for fun"; and the purpose of coordinating living rooms and, more generally, forcing similarity among groups. So the *kinds* of robustness that he sees in taste conflicts will involve, for instance, lengthy disagreements over whether Alan really ought to think that his likes/dislikes match a certain group's general likes/dislikes, or attempts by Clare to force Alan to let her hang a decoration up on the wall. The account must insist that these are the kinds of things we are really doing (or aiming at) when we do things like this: get one party to taste the item again while comparing it to a related item; point out that some feature of the item is also present in something that is clearly not delicious; get the other to see that they need to taste the item mixed with something else, or slowly, or while not so drunk. But in fact, we seem rather to be doing these latter things because we want to convince each other of what we think are the good reasons for thinking something is or is not delicious. And if you keep arguing that this paisley couch really is beautiful *only* because you want to decorate the living room, or you keep telling me a bunch of things that sound like you are citing features of Marmite that make it delicious, but in doing so, you are *only* trying to get me to go to this Marmite restaurant, then I will become suspicious of you. Even if you are trying to get me to decorate with you *via* my first *believing* what you're convincing me of, I would definitely want to be told if these are the only reasons why you are doing what you are doing. Knowing that they are would cause me to be wary of trusting your *aesthetic* or *gustatory judgment*, even if I understand that you are being prudent.

## 1.7 What's Next

I have argued that contemporary standard and non-standard contextualist (or "relativist") semantic views about judgments about matters of taste—no matter whether they can construct some notion of 'genuine disagreement' under which we can reasonably classify taste disagreement—cannot allow for the fact that we engage in *reasoned* taste disagreement. The criticism takes appearances at face value: we seem to and really do trade reasons for and against something's being delicious, as opposed to reasons that are essentially dependent on our purposes or interests, likes or dislikes. I have also tried to independently defend this appearance via some considerations about how best to understand our being able to "call bullshit" on certain acquisitions of taste, especially in contrast to our judgments of "inauthenticity."

The skeptical worry will no doubt continue to be that any gustatory reasons here must be relative somehow to our subjectivity; if we have to re-construe our evaluative judgments about acquisitions of taste, if we have to re-construe our understanding of taste disagreements, so be it. One cannot directly combat thoroughgoing skepticism. Still, one can tenaciously demand good motivations. In what comes next, the skeptic makes another attempt to meet such a demand, and I continue to resist.

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## Chapter 2

# Gustatory Testimony and Gustatory Authenticity

### 2.1 Introduction

I argued in the last chapter that taste judgments are based on “distinctively gustatory reasons”—reasons not merely sourced in our likes, tastes, interests, and such things. In our gustatory practices, we acknowledge, utilize and expect these reasons. When we disagree over matters of taste, we cite gustatory reasons, and detect as irrelevant ulterior reasons. We also acquire tastes on the basis of reasons, as is seen by the way we negatively evaluate certain acquisitions of tastes and distinguish those evaluations from evaluations of whether our acquisitions are loyal to our likes or are otherwise “authentic.” The appearance of such reasons presents a difficulty for various forms of subjectivism about gustatory matters, such as contextualist accounts of “delicious,” insofar as they are committed to skepticism about distinctively gustatory reasons. In this chapter and the following ones, I want to address the possibility that, even if a number of phenomena seem to point away from such skepticism, there are still a greater number of phenomena that point towards it. If there are, there is no difficulty accepting subjectivism, contrary to what I have argued.

Consider the following phenomena. First, we “take ourselves to be justified in thinking or asserting that something is delicious solely on the basis of our own affective reactions,” especially in contrast to judgments in quintessentially “objective” areas.<sup>1</sup> That is, taste judgment looks like it is made especially *freely*. Relatedly, we seem *reluctant* to issue taste judgments without having the relevant taste experiences. Both “I absolutely love this tuna nigiri, but I really ought to reserve judgment about whether it’s delicious” and “Tuna nigiri is delicious, but I have never tasted it” can sound odd.

Second, consider the fact that he who is given testimony that contradicts his own judgment on a matter of taste “[sees] clearly...that the approval of others provides no valid

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<sup>1</sup>The quote is from (MacFarlane, draft).

proof.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, this phenomenon is not limited to the case of standing one’s ground in the face of contrary opinion. Even if one has no opinion about some matter of taste, it can still seem odd to take testimony from others as a basis for forming such an opinion. It thus looks like we are especially *resistant* to accepting taste testimony and passing it along. “Tuna nigiri is delicious. I don’t know why, but I do know it because Ono told me so” can sound odd.

Finally, consider the fact that when it comes to taste advice, “the authority of a potential advisor must depend in part on the degree to which he or she shares the presuppositions of the person seeking advice.”<sup>3</sup> When you go to the wine store and ask for a wine recommendation, you are almost always asked, “What are you in the mood for?” or “What kind of wines do you like?” On the flip side, as an advisee, you would not take seriously someone’s suggesting that you try fried fish vertebrae despite its being common knowledge that you’re likely to dislike it. In other words, it looks like we are *wary* about both advice from others and giving advice to others.

All these phenomena, which I will label Freedom, Reluctance, Resistance, and Wariness, can seem especially understandable if taste judgment were justifiable only in virtue of our affective reactions—if, that is, gustatory reasons are merely sourced in our likes, tastes, and such things. The phenomena thus seem to point towards skepticism about “distinctively gustatory reasons,” and so indirectly towards subjectivism about taste. However, they do so only if objectivism does not have the resources to explain them. My goal in this paper will be to give such an objectivist-friendly explanation.

My specific strategy will be as follows. Focusing mainly on Resistance, I will first raise some worries about the subjectivist’s preferred explanation of Resistance. Then I consider one natural objectivist explanation of Resistance—the appeal to the idea that we need to experience and taste ourselves in order to acquire and master certain gustatory concepts involved in grasping gustatory reasons—and I give some reasons for thinking that the explanation is not fully satisfactory. As an alternative objectivist-friendly explanation, I appeal to a gustatory norm or value which I call “gustatory authenticity.” I argue that the explanation accounts well for the *complexity* of our resistance to gustatory testimony, which is revealed through more careful description of the phenomena I briefly introduced above. From there, I respond to some potential objections and briefly extend the explanation to cover Wariness and Reluctance.

This leaves only the matter of Freeness. Dealing with Freeness will be less straightforward because it is not entirely clear what sort of motivation for subjectivism can be derived from Freeness. I will save my response to potential such motivations for the next two chapters.

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<sup>2</sup>The quote is from Kant, though he was worried about aesthetic testimony: “If anyone does not think a building, view, or poem beautiful, then in the first place, he refuses...to allow approval to be wrung from him by a hundred voices all lauding it to the skies.” (Kant, 2000, p. 164)

<sup>3</sup>This observation is made by Williams (1995), though he was speaking of ethical matters.

## 2.2 Resistance: the Phenomenon

In order to evaluate the subjectivist's explanation of Resistance, we need some desiderata for a good explanation. Firstly, what needs to be explained is a *contrast* between the case of gustatory matters and other matters, such as whether more than 100,000 gallons of oil leaked into the Gulf of Mexico recently, or whether the table next to me is brown. The worry about testimony is that there seems to be an asymmetry between how "easy" it is to take testimony in other areas and how "difficult" it is in the case of gustatory matters.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, we should set aside certain cases of resistance to gustatory testimony that we are *not* trying to explain. As I will suggest below, I think certain exceptions to resistance should be included. But some clearly should not. Some cases of "resistance" to gustatory testimony are present in our practices, but they are cases that clearly do not help a subjectivist. For instance, we sometimes resist testimony in the sense that we will not base our actions on it because there are *countervailing* reasons against doing so. Perhaps we should avoid the high-end restaurant serving delicious but extremely expensive food; or we do not want to ruin someone's experience by telling her about it; or our drunken craving for something overwhelms our gustatory sensibilities. Also, we will resist gustatory testimony that is given by people we deem unreliable for any number of reasons—e.g., because the testifier is hallucinating—that do not have anything to do with our issue here.

Finally, the explanation should also account for the *complexity* of the phenomenon of Resistance. I characterized Resistance as involving the fact that it sounds odd to say, "This tuna nigiri is delicious, but I only think so because my friend said it was." But the phenomenon is not merely linguistic. The linguistic "oddity" is just one expression of our resistance to gustatory testimony. Resistance is also seen in other ways. For example, one might feel it is not sensible to *try* a food merely on the basis of another's saying that it is delicious. *If* this were a clear intuition, it would count as one that needs explaining. In fact, it seems to me, the opposite is true: sometimes we do try a food merely on the basis of another's saying that it is delicious. It is also true that we are sometimes happy to "pass along" such testimony to others. And *that*, I think, needs explaining. I want to include those cases as part of the Resistance phenomenon, as something like "standard exceptions" to resistance. This inclusion of exceptions may need some motivation. I give three reasons for including them.

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, an objectivist can simply deny the asymmetry. That is not an outlandish possibility, I think, but it is not one I pursue here, though, as we will see, I do try to "flatten" the asymmetry a bit. For a denial of a "dramatic" asymmetry, see (Schafer, 2011). I agree with Schafer that "we are often responsive to the testimony of others in forming views about aesthetics," and I agree that this is supported by "the existence of recognized experts," "the existence of programs designed to educate our...sensibilities and sense of taste," and the possibility of realizing that one has "no sense of humor" or "no eye for art" (and, I would say, "no feel for good food") on largely testimonial grounds. (Though I think Schafer overreaches a bit when he says that the "very existence" of such things "makes this very clear." (Schafer, 2011, p. 281)) However, Schafer further flattens the asymmetry by appealing to our having the right to (sometimes) "privilege" our own views, *across the board*. In this way, his response is of a piece with the first objectivist explanation I consider below. I hope to stop my "flattening" before that point.

First, I think the clear case of our trying foods on the basis of recommendations and the like is a case where somebody at least *looks like* they are doing something because they *believe* something on the basis of gustatory testimony, and the key issue here is whether we can find anything in our “gustatory practices”—in particular here, our gustatory practice with regard to testimony—that makes it seem as if we do or do not *believe* things on the (epistemic) basis of gustatory testimony. A hardcore subjectivist may deny that we *ever* do the latter; I do not think one needs to be that hardcore to *be* a subjectivist, but in any case, I think that it is still the case that he should explain away certain appearances. Here is an analogy: suppose you see a thief looking for a diamond under the bed because someone told him the diamond is under the bed; I think you may very well naturally think that the thief *believes* that the diamond is under the bed, and I think you may very well think so because you see that he is looking for a diamond there and that he is doing so because he took some testimony. Of course, it does not *follow* from the appearances that he does so believe; and of course if you are already a subjectivist, you will not think that *that* is going on in the case of “taking” gustatory testimony. So we can distinguish two kinds of “taking” of gustatory testimony—the kind of taking whereby one does not believe on the basis of testimony (but one *only* acts on its basis (or only on the basis of its having been given)), and the (supposed) kind whereby one does so believe. The hardcore subjectivist will want to say that he can allow the former though he denies the latter. And he can, as long as he makes sense of the appearances. But notice that it also does not *follow* from our finding it weird to say, “This nigiri is delicious, but I only think so because my friend said it was,” that the person (epistemically speaking) should not believe that the nigiri is delicious on the basis of testimony. And notice that an objectivist may want to say that he can allow that we find it weird to say such things. And he can allow it, as long as he makes sense of the appearances. The point here is that *both* appearances here should be taken as part of the phenomenon “to be explained.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, I also think there are also somewhat intuitive cases, not *just* of our acting on testimony in some merely practical way, but *directly* of our believing something on the basis of testimony, without a problem. First, suppose you and I have a particular stance towards “ethnic food.” We both think that it is at its worst when taken up by certain fancy restaurateurs. We both think a paradigm example of this is a new noodle restaurant, Nood, which ups the brand-name of its meat at the expense of average-tasting noodles and a dumbed-down broth. We think this violates the soul of Asian noodles. With this shared background of sensibilities, it is the easiest thing for me to accept your testimony when you tell me that the noodles at another new restaurant, Soop, is not delicious, and when you tell me why: “Because they dumb down the soup even worse than at Nood.” I sense no need to resist testimony here; and what I mean is that I feel no barrier to believing, because you told me so, that the noodles at Nood are not delicious. (Caveat: my intuition is a *bit*

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<sup>5</sup>Furthermore, if we take the case of our trying foods on the basis of recommendations as part of the phenomena to be explained, we will see that *even if* you are a subjectivist, the explanation of the phenomenon is not obviously just that it is *never* warranted to take gustatory testimony; it may be the case rather that it is just *mostly* not warranted. That is, this latter may very well be true for subjectivism-inspired reasons.

less simplistic than this; I actually think that I may feel conflicted, as I will explain when I suggest an objectivist explanation of Resistance below. But in any case, I certainly do not think in this case that I *clearly should* resist the testimony.) I am not denying that a subjectivist can explain this case away—quite the contrary, as we will see soon—but it seems to me nevertheless an initial reason to allow that there are relevant “exceptions” to resistance, especially since allowing this will not rule out subjectivism in general.<sup>6</sup>

Second, consider the cases that Schafer (2011) mentions: cases where on the basis of testimony I realize that I am missing something gustatorily good, though my gustatory responses are nevertheless not engaged. I feel this way about most great classical music and French films. I know I am missing something, and I know this because of what other trustworthy people tell me. Similarly, there was a time when I hated sushi, and at that time I *knew* I was missing something, and I knew this because of what people in the know told me. These cases, if described accurately, are cases where I do not merely act on the basis of testimony (or where I positively do nothing on the basis of testimony), but I also believe on the basis of testimony. The question here is whether it is plausible to think that all such intuitive cases are ones where either I do not really know on the basis of testimony, or all I believe is something about what I should try, what I do not like, what I would like were the world radically more idealized (than it realistically could become), or what I wish I could like (though if it is the last that is at issue, we can ask why, and the answer will likely be that I know that I am missing something). I do not find this very plausible. Given that there may very well be cases where I am believing on the basis of testimony despite how common resistance is, I think we should allow the exceptions as part of what needs to be explained.

## 2.3 The Acquaintance Principle

Resistance (as well as Reluctance and Pickiness) seems to point to subjectivism purportedly because it seems to be “well-explained” by some version of what has been called, in aesthetics, the Acquaintance Principle, which embodies the idea that gustatory reasons are not “distinctive.”<sup>7</sup> The following is a version of it as applied to matters of taste.

Acquaintance Principle: Being justified in making a gustatory judgment that some item is delicious requires one to have had, and to have based the judgment on, the relevant positive gustatory experiences of the item.<sup>8</sup>

This principle initially seems to be able to account for our phenomena. For instance, if the principle holds, then the reason we are reluctant to give gustatory testimony without

<sup>6</sup>One thing a hardcore subjectivist might say here is that the case is not one in which we believe something “solely” on the basis of testimony. I am not sure if that is true. (If it is, it cannot be only because we, in general, need a background of information to justifiably believe anything on the basis of testimony, lest the worry over-generalizes into one about whether testimony is ever a “distinctive source” of warrant.)

<sup>7</sup>Freeness is compatible with the Acquaintance Principle, but the reason it points towards subjectivism is not that it is well-explained by the principle.

<sup>8</sup>A classic version of the acquaintance principle is to be found in (Wollheim, 1980).

having had the relevant gustatory experiences is that we are reluctant to judge a matter without justification, and having justification is dependent on our affective reactions. And the reason we are resistant to take gustatory testimony is the same: we are reluctant to accept a judgment without good reason. Accepting testimony would not allow us to fulfill a necessary condition on having good reason, since it cannot transmit the requisite affective reactions across people. The principle also seems to straightforwardly explain the relevant asymmetries: gustatory testimony is not a good source of justification compared to testimony about the number of gallons of oil leaked.<sup>9</sup>

Notice that the principle requires that one needs to have *based* one's judgment on the requisite gustatory experiences to have an epistemic right to the judgment. The principle should not be confused with the following one:

Causal Acquaintance: Being justified in making a gustatory judgment that some item is delicious requires one (merely) to have (had) the relevant positive gustatory experiences of the item.

The latter principle mentions nothing about the epistemic “basis” by which one judges; it gives only a *causal* condition on justification. This suggests one avenue of objectivist response: perhaps the skeptic is confusing causal conditions with requirements on epistemic “bases.” Later in the paper, I will consider (and reject) this kind of response.

There are a number of aspects of the Acquaintance Principle that call for clarification from the skeptic. First, what are the “relevant positive gustatory experiences?” If the principle just says that our judgments have to be based on experiences of, e.g., the deliciousness-relevant flavors of a dish, then the principle clearly says nothing that would be of help to the skeptic.<sup>10</sup> So the skeptic has to understand “positive gustatory experiences” in terms of something like “affective reactions,” and it may be difficult to characterize those in a way that is incompatible with the existence of distinctively gustatory reasons.<sup>11</sup> To avoid

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<sup>9</sup>In fact, a contrast with the case of color would be less straightforward if the gustatory subjectivist wants also to be a color subjectivist. In that case, he will need to find other ways of explaining why we seem less resistant to take color testimony. He may try to appeal to the standard perceptual mechanisms in color detection; but standard perceptual mechanisms are also involved in taste detection.

<sup>10</sup>For it may just be that we must (at bottom) experience the features of a dish that make it delicious in order to properly judge its deliciousness, much like we must (at bottom) experience the features of something that make it colored or shaped in order to properly judge its color or shape. This seems just to be a form of empiricism across the board.

<sup>11</sup>For instance, why should the searing pain associated with the hot peppers in something delicious count (as it should) as a “positive” experience which counts in favor of the goodness of the food? Presumably because one enjoys the pain. But surely only certain kinds of enjoyment matter. If I enjoy something I'm eating only because it is being served by a beautiful waitress, then *even if* I accurately glom onto the taste of the item in question, I am not, I think, having a “relevant positive gustatory experience.” I do not enjoy the food because of the taste of the food. (To make this vivid: suppose you have vivid experiences of enjoyment of the first bite of something because of its taste, then in the next bite, somebody spills wine all over your new shirt while you're chewing, and you suddenly have vivid experiences of non-enjoyment. You should not thereby be justified in thinking that the item just changed from delicious to disgusting.) The question then arises: what kinds of enjoyments count as relevant? Can this question be answered completely independently



worrying about this here, we could instead talk of the judgments needing to be based on one's own "gustatory sensibilities," where these are thought of as "standards" for judging deliciousness. However the subjectivist wants to think of those standards, we can capture the spirit of subjectivism by making sure that standards are such that they call for different judgments between different people; and that adjudication of the standards themselves (i.e., any judgment as to which standard is correct) never operates via judgments about deliciousness.<sup>12</sup>

As it stands, the principle also faces some potential counterexamples. First, suppose I have never tasted a particular species of fish, but I know I receive disastrously negative gustatory experiences whenever I taste fish of a wide variety of species. Nobody should deny that I am warranted in judging that the fish before me is not delicious, despite not having based such a judgment on receiving the relevant negative gustatory experiences from that *particular* fish. We might include amongst the "relevant" experiences ones derived from kinds of objects. However, we seem to be able to be justified in judging something delicious just by knowing that it is of a kind that is only very *similar* to kinds we have tried in the past. Second, suppose I taste a wine right after chewing on watercress and taking a whiff of a perfume, and I have the relevant negative gustatory experiences. I have not thereby met the requirement imposed by the spirit of the skeptic's Acquaintance Principle

To accommodate these worries enough to get the skeptical/subjectivist explanation off the ground, we can think of the Acquaintance Principle in the following weaker, more convoluted way:

Acquaintance Principle, Weaker: Having the right to a gustatory judgment that some item is delicious requires that one has (and has based the judgment on) the relevant positive gustatory experiences of the item (where these experiences are understood in skeptic-friendly terms), and either (b) that one has these experiences "in the appropriate circumstances" (to rule out cases of an "off" palate), or (c) that one knows that one *would have* such experiences if one tastes the item in the appropriate circumstances (so one does not have to actually undergo the particular experiences in order to be justified).<sup>13</sup>

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of what sorts of gustatory reasons we have? Perhaps we want to say that the kinds of enjoyments that count are ones that are "intrinsically" enjoyable or desirable, but that is exactly why the case of searing pain is relevant. It is hard to see how searing pain is "intrinsically" desirable or enjoyable, unless we understand it as so because enjoying searing pain sometimes counts as a gustatorily *appropriate* reaction.

<sup>12</sup>The latter requirement makes sure that subjectivism does not just collapse into objectivism. If the standards are just held by individuals on the basis of what they see to be *the* correct standard for judging an item's deliciousness, *tout court*, then the fact that reasons are "dependent" on such standards is not something that should faze a non-subjectivist, since it just marks the fact that we each have a view about what the correct standard is—of course such views may be completely wrong.

<sup>13</sup>This last clause may cause one to think that the principle is so weakened that it can no longer be used to explain Resistance because it leaves room for cases of belief on the basis of gustatory testimony. I actually think this is a plausible feature of the principle because I think there *are* exceptions to resistance. In any case, even if I am wrong about this, the subjectivist can use the principle by building into it a singular exception for cases of testimony. The point of the counterfactual in (c) is only to allow that we can sometimes infer,

I will assume that some such version of this principle can be specified in skeptic-friendly terms.

## 2.4 Obstacles for the Skeptic's Explanation

I have hinted at how the Acquaintance Principle might explain straightforward cases of Resistance and their contrast with other areas of discourse. Let us consider how it might do so in more detail, and whether it can also make sense of the “complexity” of the phenomenon. The skeptic will probably want to deal with both resistance and non-resistance “data” in terms of the difference between being able to share and not being able to share the relevant kinds of gustatory experiences. Here is how such an explanation would go. The Acquaintance Principle tells us that we have to base our judgment on our own gustatory experiences in order to have epistemic right to it. If the testifier's judgment is based on sensibilities different than our own, then the judgment is likely not based on the gustatory experiences we would have were we to taste the item ourselves. So we face the risk of adopting a judgment to which we have no epistemic right, according to the Principle, and that is reason to resist adopting the testifier's judgment as our own. This looks like a reasonable explanation of when we do resist. From here, the skeptic explains exceptions to resistance by suggesting that exactly when we encounter such exceptions is when we *do* share gustatory sensibilities with the testifiers. If we have reason to think the testifier shares our gustatory sensibilities, then we have reason to think that we would have the same kinds of gustatory experiences were we to taste the relevant items, and so we have reason to think that we are not violating the Acquaintance Principle. There is thus no reason (or not *that* reason) to think we would be taking testimony to which we have no epistemic right, so we do not need to resist it.

This explanation needs to at least be “extensionally” correct; are there central exceptions to Resistance where “gustatory sensibilities” are not shared? There do seem to be. Suppose I, a rather novice wine drinker, walk into the boutique wine shop known for the good taste of its wine salespersons. The saleswoman tells me that this small French wine opens one's eyes to what good Syrah should taste like, without all that “Californization.” In this case, it is not true that I would only take her word on this issue if I know her “gustatory sensibilities” match mine, especially since I am so curious about her opinion exactly because her sensibilities do *not* match mine; for I know they are *better* than mine.<sup>14</sup> Cases like this abound, and in general, we care about seeking out those whose sensibilities are good, not those whose sensibilities just happen to be like ours. If you want to learn about what makes Schezuan cuisine so good, you obviously do not want to ask the guy who only likes hamburgers and steaks, even if you only like hamburgers and steaks.<sup>15</sup>

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from our past (non-testimony-based) knowledge of things similar to the item we have not yet tasted, that it is gustatorily good or not—I do not see why anyone would deny that.

<sup>14</sup>We also take testimony from those whose (differing) sensibilities are not better, but just differently good.

<sup>15</sup>Notice this is so even if you explicitly refuse to then act on what you have learned. Does the hardcore subjectivist want to insist there is no belief in these cases? Or that we are only believing things about what

The subjectivist (if he allows exceptions to Resistance at all) may here invoke the distinction between taking testimony by believing on its basis (and acting on it), and taking testimony *only* by acting on it. He could then try to rule out all the cases where we seek the testimony of those with “better” sensibilities as either cases in which we just do share gustatory sensibilities with testifiers, and so do not violate the Acquaintance Principle, or cases in which we are only acting on the basis of testimony without believing on its basis (and so also not violating the Acquaintance Principle). Another avenue of response is to note that the (weakened) Acquaintance Principle states only that the relevant gustatory experiences need to be had in the “appropriate circumstances.” So perhaps the above counterexamples are cases where we are only considering what kinds of gustatory experiences we would have in circumstances that are not “appropriate.” For instance, perhaps my being less of a wine expert than the wine saleswoman makes it the case that I would not be in the appropriate circumstance were I to taste the wine now.<sup>16</sup> In general, the skeptic has two strategies available against potential counterexamples: the first is to deny that people really believe things on the basis of testimony by trusting those with *better* (or good) sensibilities; the second is to allow this, but to account for the notion of ‘betterness’ or ‘goodness’ in skeptic-friendly terms. For example, perhaps the skeptic can say that being an ‘expert’ or having ‘better’ wine sensibilities involves being more in tune with the social milieu surrounding the likes of influential people like Robert Parker.

Suppose the skeptic attempts the first strategy above. It seems to me that the skeptic will then want to say is that what we are doing when we seek out those with better sensibilities is only figuring out “what to try next,” and this has nothing to do with me believing on the basis of testimony. But if we are *only* deciding “what to try next,” it does not seem to make sense that we seek others out at all, unless we are trying to figure out what to try next in what I called, in Chapter 1, a “bullshit” way. We discriminate between those we trust because of their gustatory sensitivity and those we trust for “ulterior” reasons: to figure out how to develop tastes that adhere to the social norms, or to appear cool, or to impress people, or what not. To construe all cases of the former simply as cases of the latter seems just to be implicitly re-construing the notion of betterness (that is, to take the second strategy above). Perhaps the skeptic can suggest instead that in all our supposed exceptional cases, we are merely trying to figure out what we like. But if so, it is hard to see why we could not go right ahead and believe a testifier about something like that. I know you like lamb tacos and guacamole, so I know you would probably like this lamb supertaco, since it is a lamb taco with guacamole. My testifying that the lamb supertaco is good may be a way of telling you that you would like it, so if you were seeking out my advice on such a thing, you could surely take my testimony and *believe* it. For those who deny any exceptions to resistance, this is a problem. Against the less extreme subjectivist, my complaint would be that he is construing all cases of non-resistance like this one kind of case.

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others think?

<sup>16</sup>Of course, the skeptic needs to understand the notion of ‘expertise’ in a way compatible with his skepticism.

It seems to me that the subjectivist would do better by just employing the second strategy above and explicitly re-construing the notion of betterness in skeptic-friendly terms. The risk of distortion would then be the one hinted at above. We can see this by considering the naive suggestion mentioned above: that betterness of sensibility is a matter of coming to be more in tune with the social milieu surrounding the likes of Robert Parker. The immediate problem with this suggestion is that we distinguish between seeking out those with sensibilities that are in tune with a certain social milieu and seeking out those with sensibilities that are *gustatorily* better. There is “evidence” for this in our *evaluative* attitudes towards such searches. There is something bad about seeking out gustatory information from someone just because she is of the “proper” social milieu that is not likewise bad about seeking information from someone just because she is of a better gustatory sensibility. “You only want to know what she thinks because she hangs out with Robert Parker” is a form of *criticism*. To put the point another way, if ever it is true that we ought to seek out those with sensibilities that are in tune with that milieu, it is only because that milieu has sensibilities that are gustatorily *better*. The risk the skeptic takes is having his purported explanation of ‘betterness’ succumb to this kind of worry. Here I leave it as a mere risk because I think there is no general case to be made here. In contrast to the very similar point I made in the last chapter, where I argued that we think that there are distinctively gustatory reasons because we have a *distinctive* evaluative attitude towards certain acquisitions of taste—that of “calling bullshit”—I do not think there is a single, prominent evaluative attitude we take towards seeking out certain kinds of gustatory testimony.<sup>17</sup>

There is another way in which the above potential distortion appears in the skeptic’s explanation. The explanation suggests that when we seek reliable gustatory testimony to accept, we do so only after we have found reason to believe the testifier’s gustatory sensibilities are like our own. But this does not seem right. Rather, we gain evidence that the testifier is reliable by looking at the restaurant reviewer’s credentials with food—e.g., how much experience they have had, how well they themselves can cook, how well they can distinguish and articulate the reasons they give for some dish being boring, or spectacular, etc. With friends, we consider whether they only appreciate pop tarts and instant noodles, whether they are adventurous about new flavors and patient about detecting them, and so on.<sup>18</sup> Only some of these considerations can be thought of as evidence of “similarity or dissimilarity of sensibilities,” and where they can be so thought, it is only because the similarity (or lack thereof) is thought to point to good or bad taste. And again, if the subjectivist insists that in all such cases where we seem to seek such testifiers and those credentials, we just never (or never should) believe anything they say, this seems distorting.

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<sup>17</sup>So, for instance, suppose a subjectivist gave a kind of Humean account of what counts as a genuinely “better” sensibility, where having a good sensibility is not merely a matter of being a popular person, but of having “delicate” taste, having practiced, compared objects of taste, and so on. It is still a challenge to give this kind of account without giving up subjectivism, but there does not seem to be a *single* “negative evaluative attitude” we take towards seeking testimony from a person with sensibilities so understood.

<sup>18</sup>These points can be made independently of the controversial idea that we need to (first) “gain evidence” of a testifier’s trustworthiness in order to gain warrant from testimony.

I conclude, then, that the skeptic's explanation via the Acquaintance Principle has its share of burdens. Although it tries (or can try) to accommodate both resistance and exceptions to resistance, it faces obstacles getting the right results in the latter cases without distorting both the way in which we go about seeking testimony, as well as the way our evaluative attitudes differ with regard to various such ways of accepting testimony. Still, these worries are clearly not decisive. We need to consider whether a non-skeptic about distinctively gustatory reasons could do any better. This is what I turn to now.

## 2.5 An Initial Objectivist Alternative

The objectivist needs to explain Resistance consistently with distinctively gustatory reasons. He can do this by accepting a key premise behind our skeptic's explanation: that the reason gustatory testimony cannot be accepted has to do with an *epistemic* failure of gustatory testimony. An objectivist can accept this without being a skeptic, and there are a number of ways he can do so. In this section, I will assess these ways before suggesting we should just deny the premise altogether.

The most obvious way for an objectivist to accept the premise is by suggesting that gustatory testifiers are comparatively not very reliable. This would be a blunt way of explaining Resistance, and I think there is *something* importantly correct about it. When compared to, say, physics, "inquiry" about what is delicious is absolutely riddled with distorting influences—media, a desire for cultural capital, and the power of food to comfort and create desire being just a few of them.<sup>19</sup> However, because this strategy says nothing about whether there may be some special connection between gustatory judgment and personal experience (a possibility which the skeptic seemed to find so forceful), I want to focus on objectivist strategies that do try to do this. In any case, thinking gustatory testifiers are especially unreliable is consistent with these further objectivist strategies.

Another way we can understand Resistance in terms of an epistemic failure of testimony is by appealing to the idea, not that gustatory testifiers are epistemically faulty, but rather that the "testifiees" are epistemically faulty. In particular, an objectivist might suggest that unless the testifiee has the relevant gustatory experiences, he will be epistemically faulty in some way. Recall that the skeptic's explanation relied on the idea that gustatory *reasons* are dependent on personal experience, and recall the point I made earlier that we should not confuse this idea with the idea that such experience is a *causal* condition on justified gustatory judgments. The objectivist here can suggest that what really explains Resistance is exactly this kind of causal condition, rather than something subjective about gustatory reasons. I will consider three particular ways of pursuing this suggestion.

First, the objectivist can claim that experience is a causal condition on understanding

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<sup>19</sup>Another effect of distorting influences may be that those who want to rely on testimony may not be able to *identify* reliable testifiers, even if they exist. This would also make accepting gustatory testimony a comparatively poor way of gaining warrant (if one thinks one needs to be able to identify reliable testifiers in order to gain warrant from testimony).

the relevant gustatory concepts, and so on *understanding* the testimony being offered. However, this seems implausible. For, plausibly, the kind of competence required to understand the *meaning* of the sentences used to testify is not full mastery—it is bare competence. But in our cases of Resistance, it seems as if we do have the bare competence required for understanding. It does not seem as if the problem we have is that we do not understand the meanings of the words used; as if, were we to only understand what our testifier is saying, we would accept the testimony. Also, if it is plausible that we need gustatory experiences in order to understand certain concepts involved in the testimony being offered, it is also plausible that we need the relevant experiences in order to understand the concepts involved in any piece of testimony. For example, if it is true that one needs to be exposed to such things as coffee, lemon and wine in order to understand the concept of ‘acidity’ (and so to understand testified claims about acidic things), then it is plausible that one also needs to be exposed to such things as red firetrucks, red pigment and red lighting in order to understand the concept of ‘red’ (and so to understand testified claims about red things). If this is so, then the purported explanation would have it that we resist testimony in ordinary empirical cases where we do not share that exposure. So, for instance, a blind person would resist testimony because of his lack of exposure to color. But blind people do not seem to resist color testimony.

Second, the objectivist can claim that experience is a causal condition on gaining *knowledge* from gustatory testimony. However, this seems unmotivated. Once we’ve granted the bare semantic competence required to understand the testimony being offered, why would we not grant that accepting the testimony can confer warrant without any further obstacles? Perhaps the objectivist thinks that gustatory experience is required for more complicated kinds of epistemic competence, such as being able to recognize the relevant gustatory reasons as the reasons they are. But these sorts of epistemic skills do not seem to be required for *knowledge*. Even if they are, they would be required for knowledge in other areas, and the explanation would over-generalize to the many other areas where it does not seem like we any more often have those skills.

The objectivist may try a final possibility: he can claim that experience is a causal condition not on gaining knowledge, but only on a certain kind of *complex* understanding, and that we Resist gustatory testimony because we value this kind of understanding. Here the objectivist might start with the intuitive thought that testimony, though it can be a good source of warrant, is often a source that does not give us the same *kinds* of reasons that we might gain through reflection and inquiry on our own into some matter. The objectivist can then add that when it comes to gustatory testimony, gustatory experiences are needed for one to recognize gustatory reasons.<sup>20</sup> For example, unless one has experienced a variety of combinations of gin and vermouth in a martini, one may not be able to recognize that vermouth combined with a gin with no complexity makes for a bad martini (i.e., that the martini having such a combination of liquors is a reason to think it is not delicious). In fact,

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<sup>20</sup>This is in contrast to the skeptic’s idea that the experiences are needed for there to *be* the reasons in the first place.

one may not even be able to recognize what counts as a gin with “no complexity.” We seem to need experience to apply the concept of ‘complexity’ to deliciousness-relevant features of martinis. We also seem to need experience to realize that the lack of complexity as exhibited in some part of one’s martini amounts to, in this case, the martini’s not being delicious.

Presumably, the reason why we cannot recognize certain reasons on the basis of gustatory testimony is that testifiers cannot pass along the needed kinds of experiences. However, the objectivist here also needs to tell us why testifiers cannot simply tell us, via further testimony perhaps, the relevant reasons.<sup>21</sup> We need to know why, for instance, testifiers have to have the relevant gustatory experiences for themselves, rather than simply being told *of* the experiences. Otherwise, we will not know why the requirement of experience on understanding translates to the phenomenon of Resistance.

One story the objectivist can tell is the following. The reason we need to actually have the relevant gustatory experiences (and hence the reason why even “passing along” the gustatory reasons themselves is not enough) is not that we cannot know what the reasons are via testimony, but rather that testimony will not allow us to understand the reasons *in a certain way*. We can think of this kind of “understanding-why” as an epistemic ability to recognize reasons as reasons in particular contexts.<sup>22</sup> Understanding-why requires one to see why some gustatory concept applies in a given scenario, which requires one to see why it does or does not apply in a number of like scenarios, and this in turn requires one to have a range of experiences with such scenarios. As Hills says of the moral case, “If you have this kind of appreciation of moral reasons, you must have, at least to some extent, a systematic grasp of morality.” (Hills, 2009, p. 101) Furthermore, this kind of “systematic” grasp of gustatory concepts requires “good judgment.” (2009, pp. 103–104) Simply gaining knowledge about what the truth is and what the reasons are is not enough for such good judgment. One exercises such judgment by applying certain concepts to new scenarios and

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<sup>21</sup>Extending testimony about p to testimony about the reasons for p does not mean that any justification gained from such testimony is not really gained via testimony *per se*. Such “extended” testimony are often still paradigmatic cases of justification via testimony. Imagine, for instance, a young child’s knowing the reason that she shouldn’t lie to her brother (“Mommy said lying hurts people”), or the apathetic worker knowing the reason that the customer is not in the right place (“My boss said that this form cannot be accepted here.”)

<sup>22</sup>Hills (2009) characterizes “moral understanding” (the kind that she thinks explains why we resist moral testimony) as an understanding of “why p,” where this is the ability to treat q as the reason why (where q really is the reason why p). She characterizes this ability as the ability to follow an explanation of why p; to explain why p yourself; to draw the conclusion that p from the information that q; and to draw the conclusion that p’ from the information that q’ (where p’ and q’ are “similar to” p and q). I think this is roughly the kind of “ability to recognize reasons as reasons in particular contexts” that I am speaking of. I would add that Hills’ list of characteristics seem to exhibit one’s ability to recognize a reason as a reason because to exhibit such an ability one must be able to see why the reason is a reason in one context, but not necessarily in another, similar context. This might further be explained by the fact that recognizing a reason is to recognize a certain kind of “principle” (no matter how hedged with *ceteris paribus* clauses). This ability need not be a (sophisticated) perceptual ability, though it is sometimes exhibited as such; if a scenario is only described to you, you might still be able to recognize some aspect of that scenario as a reason.

doing so *because* one sees why the scenario is relevantly similar or not to previous ones, and so on. This ability to apply concepts plausibly requires the relevant experiences. I will not say more to articulate or defend this broad view about understanding-why, though I do find it plausible, for I think the explanation appealing to it fails as an explanation of Resistance.

The first problem is the one we have already seen. The story above claims that gustatory testimony cannot get us a certain kind of understanding-why, which requires more than the knowledge or justification gained via testimony.<sup>23</sup> But this raises the question of whether we would find resistance to testimony in *other* areas where we value understanding-why. I think so, and if so, the explanation here may be too general. In particular, in any area where we value *intellectual autonomy* very strongly, we would expect to resist testimony for the same reasons the story above cites. Intellectual autonomy is the value of “believing for oneself” or “pursuing the truth oneself,” and it seems to be valuable because, when we “do it ourselves,” we are in a position exactly to gain “understanding-why.”

A good example of this is in philosophical inquiry. It is common, I suggest, for philosophers to want to “work over” an issue themselves. We will often not let philosophical conversation proceed so quickly as to prevent us from ourselves catching up on the strands of thought being pursued; philosophy is slow in this way. And if a student goes around citing on authority Nietzsche, David Lewis, and his latest professor, and does so while not really “understanding-why” what he says is true (plausible, motivated), then we have the sense that the student is not approaching philosophy correctly. We might think he should not spend so much time *just* taking Nietzsche, etc., at his word. That is to say, he should be more resistant to testimony.<sup>24</sup>

So the appeal to understanding-why as an explanation of Resistance does not seem to capture the required *contrasts* between cases of gustation and other cases, such as philosophy. The value of understanding-why, if we abide by it, is an epistemic or intellectual value, and because of this, there is very little barrier to generalizing the explanation across other areas where we value understanding-why, for an *epistemic* value is something we pursue in any area of *inquiry*.<sup>25</sup>

Even if the objectivist “flattens” the asymmetry by insisting we do resist testimony in other areas, there is a second problem with the explanation: it does not get even the gustatory case quite right. To see this, first consider the philosophy example again. Although we highly value intellectual autonomy, this does not mean that the value *never* lapses. If a conversation

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<sup>23</sup>For an explanation of resistance to aesthetic testimony parallel to this story, see (Hopkins, draft). There Hopkins considers his view one according to which we accept aesthetic beliefs in accord with “non-epistemic” norms. But by this he just means that they are not norms governing what is required for knowledge. His view is not “non-epistemic” in the sense I lay out later. I consider Hopkins’ view an “epistemic” one because it still appeals to a norm governing belief.

<sup>24</sup>In philosophy the standards of evidence may be more stringent, and this may affect how much warrant something like testimony can give us in philosophy. However, even if this were true, it is *also* true that we particularly value intellectual autonomy in philosophy, and intellectual autonomy is not the same as stringent standards of evidence.

<sup>25</sup>I am assuming here that the plausible requirement of experience for understanding-why is a general one that holds across areas of inquiry.



proceeds too quickly despite our best efforts, still we might accept the testimony of another conversant about what was just concluded (and why) during the conversation. And although we tell our students to try to work through an issue themselves, still we expect that they take some things on authority—we do not want them to write papers that have *nothing* to do with what, say, Putnam and Burge said about content externalism. In rare cases, we might even be happy to accept testimony—e.g., on whether a logic proof is valid, or how plausible it is that knowledge is just justified true belief. So, wherever there is resistance based on the value of intellectual autonomy and understanding-why, then there should also be cases of non-resistance when that value is *overridden* or *lapses*. We can now articulate the second problem for the current explanation: sometimes when the value of understanding-why lapses, we still feel the need to resist gustatory testimony.

To be sure, the explanation here can deal with *one* kind of case of non-resistance. For example, in cases like my Soop and Nood case earlier, where we are very “in tune” with the gustatory sensibilities of our testifier and have had a range of gustatory experiences that is broadly similar to hers, accepting gustatory testimony might be no bar at all to gaining understanding-why. This is because we can *meet* the value’s demand.<sup>26</sup> The explanation thus deals well with the cases of non-resistance that the subjectivist’s appeal to the Acquaintance Principle seemed to deal well with: the cases where testifiers share gustatory sensibilities with testifies.

However, the explanation does not cover other cases of non-resistance. Consider the following example. The other day, I went to a wine shop in Berkeley with the intent of picking up a bottle of French wine. I do not know much about wine, but I had recently encountered an article about the growing popularity of Burgundy among young wine lovers in America; a documentary about wine which had unfriendly things to say about big-box Bordeaux producers; and an essay on the “soulfulness” of Burgundy in comparison to Bordeaux wines. So, just for fun, I wanted to get something that would taste very “un-Bordeaux-like.” I paid scant attention to the descriptions above the French bottles in the shop. Instead, I told the wine-seller to “just tell me what he likes.” He looked at me aghast and said, “It doesn’t matter what *I* like. It matters what *you* like.” In this case, I was not really interested in understanding why small French producers are magnificent, or why Burgundy is so subtle. I was knowingly being moved by some media describing the “romance” of Burgundy pitted against the “corporatization” of Bordeaux. That is, I was explicitly downgrading the importance of understanding-why the bottle he might have picked for me was good. Yet, I suggest, my wine-seller expressed the feeling that I ought to have been more resistant to gustatory testimony.<sup>27</sup> The explanation we have been considering, however, would have it

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<sup>26</sup>A similar case occurs among those whose philosophical sensibilities you find similar to your own. Your colleague tells you that this latest ethics article is “not so great” because “it is scientific and reductionistic, just like X’s article,” and you immediately pick up on what he is suggesting because you already understand how to grasp that kind of reason.

<sup>27</sup>Now, it is true that *he* might not have known that I was downgrading the value of understanding-why, but still you and I can detect that there was something odd about me jumping the gun and trying to get him to just tell me what he liked. It is also true that his insisting on me telling him what I *like* does not entail

that we should sense nothing odd at all, since the value of understanding was overridden. So, possible over-generalization aside, the explanation does not seem correct even for the gustatory case.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, I have shaky intuitions about the case above, and not everyone shares my intuitions. Hopkins, for instance, in defending a parallel sort of explanation for resistance to aesthetic testimony, suggests that the explanation *does* allow for all cases of exceptions to resistance. He suggests that the value “lapses” when we simply cannot form an opinion on our own, nor can we remain agnostic. His example is the case of (happily) taking film recommendations from others: “There are [too] many films showing at any one time, some no doubt worth seeing, others not...If I remain agnostic about the merits of each of them, then I must either not go to the cinema at all or choose one at random. The former is perverse, given my desire to see a movie; and the latter is risky, given that the quality of what’s on offer usually varies considerably. Agnosticism, then, is not a genuine option. But nor is investigating the matter for myself.” (Hopkins, draft, p. 13) The parallel understanding of my wine example would be that since I practically cannot on my own sift through an overwhelming amount of wine, and it would be perverse of me just not to drink any, I just should be happy to accept testimony (and my wine-seller, had he known my predicament, just should have been happy to give it).

I find Hopkins’ description inadequate. I think we feel there is still something at least *aesthetically* off about the person who does nothing on her own to figure out if the movie she is watching is any good. It may be that we cannot come up with very consistent or reliable aesthetic opinions given the vast wealth of information available, but there is a feeling here that to have a full aesthetic life, one should try (and try on the basis of one’s own experience). Similarly, although I could not have fully understood Burgundy wine, I surely should have tried in that case—they do, after all, offer tastings. Hopkins’ description does not capture how gustatorily *brash* I was being.

The inadequacy of Hopkins’ description and the sheer generality of the connection between understanding and experience drive me to consider an alternative objectivist explanation. Both the subjectivist explanation earlier and the objectivist explanation given in this section appeal to an epistemic or intellectual value. The subjectivist explains resistance by appeal to the “merely internalist” nature of gustatory justification. The objectivist in this section explains it by appeal to the epistemic value of understanding-why. I suggest we deny the shared premise we started this section with: that Resistance should be explained

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he was insisting I understand. Nevertheless, it can be understood that way, since I can only understand by coming to see, and I can do that only by having the relevant positive experiences that would get me to like something. (I should also say that I was not in a rush to go anywhere, so it was in fact possible for me to have tried harder to “figure it out on my own.”)

<sup>28</sup>An alternative conclusion to draw from the example is that the “oddness” we detect in the example is the sense that I just should not have downgraded the value of the relevant kind of understanding. I think this is wrong—sometimes values of this kind are *legitimately* overridden. Sometimes it is reasonable to taste something “for no good reason” (where this means “for no good gustatory reason” and not “for no reason at all”).

by some epistemic failure of gustatory testimony.

## 2.6 Gustatory Authenticity

Instead of appealing to epistemic values or revising the nature of gustatory reasons, let us appeal to the value of forming our own tastes and structuring our gustatory lives in a way that accords with our own tastes. This is a *gustatory* value—a value we could call “gustatory autonomy” or “gustatory authenticity.”<sup>29</sup>

It will be helpful to first look at a precedent for this kind of explanation in the case of aesthetic testimony. Keren Gorodeisky explains our supposed resistance to aesthetic testimony by appealing to what she calls “constitutive norms for aesthetic judgment,” which require that one have “direct experience of the object” in addition to judging it appropriately. (Gorodeisky, 2010) Gorodeisky insists that this is not an “epistemic” norm—it is not a norm governing what it takes for such a judgment to be epistemically warranted.<sup>30</sup> Rather, it is an *aesthetic* norm. Gorodeisky makes this clearer when she compares this aesthetic norm with other norms: “Just as one cannot be responsive to one’s beloved if one merely correctly [and justifiably] judges that the beloved is lovable without loving him, one cannot be responsive to a beautiful object if one merely correctly [and justifiably] judges it to be beautiful without taking pleasure in it.” (2010, p. 68) The norm calling for “our engagement with a beautiful object” (2010, p. 67) is a norm governing how to approach aesthetic objects and how beautiful objects should play a role in our aesthetic lives: we should work to actually appreciate them and experience the pleasures they bring; we should not simply put them at a distance and judge them.<sup>31</sup> There is thus an aesthetic value that we would be respecting by not merely judging matters of beauty on the basis of testimony but also appreciating the objects for ourselves. Applying this point to matters of gustatory taste, the

<sup>29</sup>I think such a value is one we contemporaries actually have, and so appeal to it explains why *we* resist gustatory testimony. I also think that the value has some genuine authority—that it is justified—and so I think an explanation of why we resist gustatory testimony is vindicatory: it shows how we are justified in so resisting. However, my main goal here is not to argue that this value has authority. I aim primarily to characterize the value as plausibly as I can, and to argue our valuing it explains well why we sense that we should resist gustatory testimony.

<sup>30</sup>I am using “epistemic warrant” in a broad sense that does not necessarily have to do with knowledge or justification. Gorodeisky classifies Hopkins’ solution to the problem of aesthetic testimony as “non-epistemic,” like her own. Hopkins’ solution is, indeed, one that appeals to a norm that is not a norm on how to gain aesthetic *knowledge* via testimony. But Hopkins appeals to such norms as “Requirement: having a right to an aesthetic belief requires one to grasp the *aesthetic* grounds for it.” (Hopkins, draft, p. 9) I count this as still an epistemic norm because it governs how epistemically *well* to believe some aesthetic matter. It is an *intellectual* virtue to grasp the grounds for one’s beliefs, even if the virtue is only indirectly related to truth or knowledge. Gorodeisky’s solution is different on this score.

<sup>31</sup>Gorodeisky adds that if we did put aesthetic objects at this kind of distance when we judge them, we would not *really* be making “aesthetic judgments” where this is understood in some kind of loaded sense. I would not put the point this way. It is hard to see why, if we *were* to treat aesthetic objects in a poor aesthetic manner, by judging them only on the basis of testimony—we would not nevertheless be *judging* them.

suggestion would be that there is a *gustatory* value that we respect by not merely judging matters of deliciousness on the basis of testimony but also appreciating the items ourselves, through experience.

That is a *form* of a solution. In order to flesh it out, we have to figure out what this gustatory value of gustatory authenticity is—what it means to structure our gustatory lives around our tastes; to value having our own tastes and being true to our own tastes. We also have to figure out in what way this value plays a role in our resistance of testimony. How an explanation of resistance goes here will depend on how exactly one construes this value *in relation* to other values in the vicinity, as well as to certain contingent facts about food and our tastes.

Let me make two preliminary points. First, *whatever* the value of gustatory authenticity is, it is crucial to the objectivist explanation here that it is a *gustatory* value. If it is not—if, for instance, it is only an intellectual value that is applied to gustatory matters—then the explanation is not crucially different than the one I rejected in the last section.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it is because it is a *gustatory* value that it can *clash* (with “remainder”) with other values, such as intellectual or epistemic ones. As we will see, this potential clash is important to the objectivist’s explanation here.

Second, I have described the gustatory value as one in which we structure our gustatory lives around our own tastes. This description requires a sense for “gustatory life” and a sense for “tastes.” I am thinking of “tastes” in the rough way I have been throughout these chapters: as gustatory likes and dislikes (these may be thought of as gustatory preferences), or dispositions to enjoy or not enjoy (this may be thought of as shorthand for dispositions to have a certain range of “positive” gustatory experiences, like (“intrinsically gustatory”) enjoyment, in response to certain items). Objectivists and subjectivist will probably ultimately want to understand tastes in a number of differing ways. There is one major difference that will play a role in my explanation: an objectivist will think of gustatory preferences as *responsive* to (distinctively gustatory) reasons—they tend to change in accord with what gustatory reasons we have, and they (or their formation/maintenance/etc.) are evaluable in terms of those reasons.<sup>33</sup> As for dispositions to have certain gustatory experiences of enjoyment and the like, the objectivist will ultimately probably want to question whether such things are as “thin” as a subjectivist would make them out to be; whether, in particular, they can be understood completely independently of our gustatory judgments. But I will not do that here. I will not presuppose that the notion of ‘enjoying,’ etc., is to be understood in terms of some heavy-duty notion of ‘having an experience of good flavors in the item being tasted.’ Instead, I allow the seemingly plausible assumption that there are such things as likings

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<sup>32</sup>Actually, this claim should be qualified. It may be that intellectual autonomy, when it is applied to matters of gustatory taste, plays a different kind of *role* in determining our attitude towards gustatory testimony than it does in determining our attitude towards testimony in general. For instance, perhaps the fact that we have a body of gustatory tastes makes a difference to whether intellectual autonomy explains resistance to gustatory testimony in particular.

<sup>33</sup>This difference already played a role in Chapter 1, where I suggested that the tastes we acquire are responsive to gustatory reasons.

whose content is quite a bit less than the robust content of experiences of flavors. There is nevertheless a crucial difference here between the subjectivist and objectivist: the objectivist will not think these experiences of enjoyment, liking, and such, *make* something delicious. This, however, does not rule out the possibility that these experiences are something like evidence in some cases in favor of thinking that something is delicious. Our having positive gustatory experiences may still defeasibly point to features of things that make them delicious; the objectivist can allow that, in good cases, it is our way of *accessing* such features, and so we often rely on this “way of accessing” to believe some gustatory matter.<sup>34</sup> I will say more about this as I give the explanation below, and in Chapter 4 when I discuss the justification of gustatory judgments. Finally, as for “gustatory life,” I do not mean anything more substantive than aspects of life characterized by examples like these: the actions we base on our gustatory judgments, and our attitudes towards gustatory testimony, advice, and disagreement.

Now, what is the value? To have an example in mind, recall something I discussed in an argument in Chapter 1 against interpreting “Hipster Joe” as someone whose acquisition of taste was merely “inauthentic.” In Chapter 1, I suggested that it is best to understand our hipster’s acquisition of his silly musical taste as a matter of “bullshit,” and to understand this evaluation as distinct from an evaluation of “inauthenticity.” The point there was to make sure that room was *also* made for the evaluation of bullshit, which I argued tracks a concern for non-subjectivist, distinctively gustatory reasons. Now, however, I am taking up the then-dismissed evaluative dimension. When speaking of how we might evaluate Joe as “inauthentic,” I spoke of Joe’s not being a person who acquired a new taste based on his own likes. Valuing a person who does acquire a taste based on his own likes is an example, I suggest, of valuing gustatory authenticity. Another relatively clear example of organizing one’s gustatory life around one’s own tastes is not tasting things that one does not genuinely like just because one is in front of company.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Does this mean we rely on the *experiences*—that they are the epistemic *bases* on which we believe gustatory matters? Compare this question with another one in epistemology: does the fact that our experiencing something gives us reason to believe something mean that we base our beliefs on experiences (as opposed to, say, features of and facts about our environment that we see)? This kind of difficult question is one I hope I can remain neutral on here.

Another issue I will not take up is whether it is realistic to speak only of one’s experiences of “enjoyment” as the only relevant gustatory “responses.” This seems radically over-simplistic to me. We do not just barely like or enjoy, we also experience and feel craving, anticipation and tension, surprise and release, overwhelmed and challenged, comforted and refreshed, etc. For a defense of the idea that the “pleasure” we experience even in gustation is various and complicated, in virtue of being based in a plurality of values, Stocker (see 1989, pp. 184–193). Stocker claims even gustatory pleasures should be understood as “fitting together, having a proper direction and development, contrasting, growing with, and enhancing each other, and as thus occupying a complex logical space of appreciation, tone, quality, and value.” Although I find this idea very compelling, I will be assuming that, even if we make the responses more realistic, still there will be a body of experiences/responses the having of which can be said to be our way of access to an item’s deliciousness, without those experiences being full-blown experiences as of the item being delicious.

<sup>35</sup>The value of authenticity can be overridden in a particular case. We have all tried things in other people’s homes just to show due respect to those gracing us with their hospitality.

Two characteristics of inauthenticity stand out. One sign that Joe is being inauthentic is that he is just conforming his tastes to those around him. Conformism is one's (deliberately or not) allowing one's life to be structured in accord with pre-determined social roles or others' conceptions of who you ought to be.<sup>36</sup> What specifically counts as conformity can be difficult to determine.<sup>37</sup> Still, there are clear cases from which we can draw. One need only think of people flocking to ongoing food trends—e.g., Joe's strange subcultural events, "foodies," "street food" carts, "molecular gastronomy." Another characteristic of inauthenticity is that one has tastes that are "arbitrary" or "hasty." "Arbitrary" or "hasty" tastes are often dissimilar from one another. If you encounter someone who loves the taste of soda one day, whiskey the next, and milk the third, you might suspect he does/did not *really* love some of those things. But dissimilarity is not sufficient.<sup>38</sup> What we seem to be tracking if we suspect that Hipster Joe moves from one taste to another is a certain kind of fickleness. Not only are the changes too quick, the tastes changed are ones which weigh heavily in his gustatory life—his *favorites* change. Compare this overall lack of narrative with extreme examples of a gustatorily authentic life: a culinary adventurer who carefully chooses to eat more intense and more exotic foods, and with an eye to new things that push culinary boundaries; or a "humble" gourmand who relishes her simple pasta dishes and rustic cooking with backyard garden ingredients, with an eye towards simplifying old traditions. Unlike Joe, these latter people do not flit about from one gustatory experience to another.<sup>39</sup>

That is a preliminary characterization of the value. How does appeal to it help explain Resistance? The key gap one has to cross in this explanation is that between one's valuing having one's own tastes and one's not believing on the basis of gustatory testimony. This crossing can look like a leap: what do tastes have to do with beliefs? One way to try to cross the gap collapses the explanation given here into one that relies fundamentally on the value of intellectual autonomy, whereby one values believing in accord with one's own reasons, which are, in the case of gustation, often a matter of believing in accord with one's own taste experiences. Since those taste experiences partially result from our likes and dispositions to enjoy, we may think that there is a connection between tastes, belief and intellectual autonomy such that valuing "abiding by our own tastes" is just a matter of valuing having our own reasons, and so a matter of valuing intellectual autonomy. In other words, if we value intellectual autonomy, we will resist testimony. Unfortunately, as I have already said, we will also resist testimony in every other area where we value intellectual autonomy, and that doesn't acknowledge the intuition that we find gustatory testimony *especially* worth resisting.<sup>40</sup> That is not the way I want to cross that gap. I do not want to focus on the

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<sup>36</sup>Though, as a number of philosophers such as Charles Taylor, Robert Pippin, and Bernard Williams have noted, it may be that some forms of social dependence are actually necessary for authenticity.

<sup>37</sup>One difficulty is that conformism can look like an undeveloped or unstable identity (the latter can be different way of being inauthentic). Oppression from the outside can look like unsteadiness from the inside.

<sup>38</sup>After all, if the person loves the taste of soda *and* whiskey *and* milk, there is nothing particularly suspicious going on—his tastes are just modestly cosmopolitan.

<sup>39</sup>Well, the adventurer flits about, but not in the same way.

<sup>40</sup>Though, again, the fact that we have a body of gustatory tastes may make the demands of intellectual

possibility that we value our own dispositions to enjoy only in the sense that they result in experiences that give us access to reasons that then allow us to believe “for ourselves.” First of all, such dispositions, if they really are understood as just our dispositions to “enjoy,” do not *necessarily* result in experiences that give us access to reasons, since we do not necessarily enjoy the considerations that point to something’s being delicious.<sup>41</sup> Second of all, even if they do result in them, it is strange to then talk about our valuing the likes or the dispositions themselves, as opposed to our valuing our coming to see the reasons *through* those relevant experiences. In any case, let us try to do without intellectual autonomy and see how far we get.

Let us suppose that there is this gustatory value of abiding by our own tastes, without yet asking whether there is any reason to think this value has any authority. If there is this value, then it implies, I think, that when we have certain tastes, we value maintaining them and not changing them. But if tastes are responsive to reasons, then we will be pressured to change those tastes when we encounter reasons suggesting a judgment that conflicts with what those experiences of enjoyment (and the like) suggest to us. Those experiences suggest that what we are tasting is delicious, but we may gain some reason to think otherwise (for instance, we realize that we are drunk, or a testifier gives us really compelling considerations as to why the item is disgusting). In such cases, the gustatory value pressures us not to change our tastes.

At this point, options arise for my objectivist. I have so far said that we feel “pressure” to maintain our own tastes. We might continue by saying that the gustatory value *always* actually gets us to maintain our own tastes, or we might not. If we do say it, then, I think, the explanation becomes too implausible. For maintaining such an extreme position requires us to then explain why we would maintain tastes just because they are our own *even when* we encounter reasons that point us away from them. Why would we do that, when it looks completely *irrational*? After all, as the objectivist maintains, it is not what our tastes happen to be that determines what reason there is to believe something about some gustatory matter; it is rather that *sometimes* our tastes constitute the way we access what reason there is to believe something about the gustatory matter; so if we stick to our own (possibly imperfect) tastes and believe according to them, despite whatever *actual* reasons we have, that would be highly irrational. Surely the objectivist is not being charitable by suggesting we are just highly irrational. Furthermore, surely the objectivist is not appealing to the value of gustatory authenticity only to suggest that this value, if followed, would result in our being highly irrational, for the latter would seem to be a pretty compelling reason to give up the value as a value with any authority over us.<sup>42</sup>

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autonomy stronger in the gustatory case. I will not consider this possibility here.

<sup>41</sup>This again assumes that “enjoyment” is understood in a “thin” enough sense.

<sup>42</sup>One option here is try to say that there are “non-epistemic reasons” for beliefs, but first of all, that is quite controversial; and second of all, even if there were, suggesting that we always abide by our own tastes would suggest that non-epistemic reasons for maintaining beliefs, whenever they clash with epistemic ones, will always override the epistemic ones. But this is highly implausible. Why would non-epistemic reasons for belief have that power when other reasons for belief do not, or why would they have such power only

Given this, we might try to jump to the opposite extreme. We might acknowledge that if (as the objectivist allows is possible) there are good reasons from testimony for believing something about a gustatory matter, then these reasons should get us to believe that thing, and we should revise any conflicting tastes accordingly (since they are, as the objectivist maintains, responsive to reasons). But, *still*, there is a gustatory value of authenticity—of valuing maintaining our own tastes. It is just that the epistemic value of believing on the basis of good reasons always overrides the gustatory value; epistemic values are demanding. So although the gustatory value pressures us to maintain our own tastes, very often we cannot listen to it. Very often we are gustatorily inauthentic because we want to be epistemically responsible. But this way now seems to suggest, not only that we only sometimes resist (reliable) gustatory testimony, but that we *never* resist it. That hardly seems to be an explanation of the phenomenon!

In fact, I think this latter option is much more plausible than the first one, and also more plausible than it might first appear. Even if the possibility entails that we never resist gustatory testimony, it still does not entail that we do not at least *prima facie* resist gustatory testimony, and that may be enough to explain “Resistance.” Just like it is not an objection to the subjectivist’s (or the alternative objectivist’s) explanation of exceptions to resistance if all gustatory testifiers are highly unreliable, but for irrelevant reasons (e.g. we rounded up those with good taste and drugged them), and so we in fact *never* take gustatory testimony; so it is not an objection to this explanation if what explains our “resistance” to testimony is something that is always overridden. Furthermore, we can find “evidence” of the overridden. For instance, when a value is overridden, often we will feel a sense of regret. And I think this does happen in many cases of gustatory testimony—we feel conflicted about how to face testimony. On the one hand, we want to stick to our own tastes; on the other hand, we want our beliefs about gustatory matters to follow the good reasons. I think this results in some of the characteristic phenomena surrounding gustatory testimony. To rehearse some of them: we seek testimony from those with better sensibilities, but we do so while also hoping to see soon for ourselves, reacting with our own dispositions to like, enjoy or respond. If we end up fully believing on the basis of the testimony, we might feel some regret giving up any conflicting tastes we might have had; or we might feel pressure to “retrospectively disown” those tastes we thought we had—to make them alien to us: “I thought I liked things like that; but I was wrong”; “I used to be the kind of person that liked only frozen pizza, but that wasn’t really me.” And we often hesitate or waver in our belief based on testimony: “I think it *might* be good; a friend I trust says so,” and even “It must be good—my trusted friend said so” (but with some hesitation concluding, “It really *is* good”).<sup>43</sup> Sometimes we will both take testimony and not revise our own tastes, and “live with” the conflict for a while, waiting for our tastes to “catch up,” so to speak. Here is something I have said many times before: “I know classical music is good music; but I just don’t know (yet) how to

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when it comes to gustatory matters?

<sup>43</sup>Erica Klempner pointed out to me that even if we are willing to say, “The Grand Canyon must be beautiful,” on the basis of testimony, even without having seen it, we may feel some hesitation going on to say, “It is beautiful.”



get myself to love listening to it.” A food case: “I know there must be/is something good about natto (Japanese fermented soy bean)—everyone keeps telling me that the flavor can be really good—but the slimy texture keeps putting me off because it reminds me too much of *Aliens*, the movie; I can’t bring myself not to find it revolting (yet).” So, the explanation here may force us to say not quite that we resist testimony, but that we *feel resistance* toward testimony, but that may be enough.

Are there cases where gustatory values “win out” over epistemic ones? Of course, the gustatory value will be overridden only when confronted with demanding epistemic value.<sup>44</sup> So when we are confronted with testimony about gustatory goods which reason is *indifferent towards*, then no epistemic demand is getting us to change our *tastes*. These would be cases where there is a plurality of gustatory goods or values; your tastes hew you to one side, and somebody is testifying for the other side. These are *not*, however, obviously cases of resisting reliable gustatory testimony. For if the testimony is that some item (or some balance of values or goods) is better, and we are dealing with a case where it is not—we just have a plurality of goods—then the testimony is just *inaccurate* or *unreliable* (and so of course we should “resist” it, but of course that is also not at issue). And if the testimony is that some item is good (one kind of good, good in some way, etc.), then even if tastes are “responsive to reasons” as I have suggested, the testimony here need not (rationally) conflict with our tastes—exactly because reason is indifferent between the goods. In such cases, I do not think we necessarily feel any resistance to gustatory testimony. Insofar as we do, we might say that it is not because accepting gustatory testimony may rationally conflict with our tastes, but that accepting it will tend us to also form tastes for the other, different good, and in some cases, that may put pressure on our own tastes (perhaps because a single gustatory life cannot sustain too many strong likes). However, still, in such a case it may just be epistemically irrational to not accept that the other item does have *some* gustatory value, that it is in some way good, so we may still have here a case of conflict between epistemic value and gustatory value, in which case the former wins out.

So even when we are dealing with pluralistic goods reason is indifferent towards, there may be no case where the gustatory value of authenticity “wins out” when it comes in conflict with epistemic values. Nevertheless, the above cases of pluralism at least show that the gustatory value of authenticity has a large realm to “show itself”: exactly the realm where reason does not drive us all the way to preferring one thing *rather* than another; or to judge one thing as better or worse than the other. In such a realm, our value of authenticity demands we form our own tastes—to make up our own gustatory identity, so to speak.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>This is not to say that it is overridden when confronted with all intellectual values. So, for instance, we might care more about sticking to our own tastes than understanding-why something is delicious; if gustatory testimony is helping us understand-why, and not just getting us to believe something reliable, we would exhibit some kind of “resistance” to it (even if we still believe on the basis of the testimony).

<sup>45</sup>Compare this to the plurality of things that count as a good life. When we say that you should “be or become who you really are,” the value thus expressed is not always overridden by, say, moral demands. It does in the case of, say, the choice between being a really unique serial killer versus being a really unique family man. But it does not in the case of the choice between being a mathematician and being a philosopher.

Seeing the value of gustatory authenticity also helps us understand why it makes some sense that what we are dealing with here is not just intellectual autonomy, applied to gustatory matters. The point here is not just that we value coming to see the truth ourselves (though we do value this); the point is that we sometimes have to go with our own likes when we are living our gustatory lives—we want gustatory preferences and to live according to them in such a way that “hangs together” and has some overall narrative, and so rules out, for instance, having extremely fickle tastes or merely conforming to others, even if doing so would *not* violate good gustatory reason because of the plurality of gustatory goods. Abiding by our own reasons, as a matter of valuing intellectual autonomy, does not in the same way allow us to avoid conformism when it comes to preferences that reason does not dictate. In fact, when it comes to our epistemic values, there is surely not a parallel value of abiding by your own reasons *simply because they are your own*. If we abide by our own reasons, if we try to see for ourselves, it is because we want to gain understanding. It cannot be because we value, say, having our own reasons, period. Compare this to: valuing having our own beliefs. Owing beliefs is not what is important to us about beliefs. Owing tastes is (a part of) what is important to us about tastes.

There is one last thing the objectivist who appeals to the gustatory value of authenticity may want to say once we acknowledge pluralism. It is not often clear whether we are faced with testimony over gustatory judgment about items, goods, or values that reason is indifferent between, or not. So it can often be justified for a taster to think that he can reasonably respect the gustatory value because he justifiably thinks he is ignoring unreliable gustatory testimony about something’s being just better or worse when it is (he thinks) really a matter of pluralism. And this may be so even if he is only misleadingly justified and wrong: even if the testimony is actually reliable. In other words, the fact that one would incorrectly “go in” for the gustatory value may *sometimes* be a way of explaining *actual* overall resistance to reliable testimony.<sup>46</sup>

## 2.7 Advantages of the Appeal to Authenticity

Though not perfect, I think this appeal to gustatory authenticity does pretty well in comparison to both the subjectivist and the alternative objectivist explanations I covered in this chapter. First, it can accommodate in a principled way many of the cases that sit well with the other two explanations. For instance, the skeptical explanation was most comfortable with cases where the similarities between the likes of testifier and testiftee seem to affect whether or not testimony calls for resistance. So, according to the skeptic, since

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In the latter case, we say that you *should* go with what is “for you” and avoid what is not “for you,” even though the moral reasons are indifferent between the two (let us say). The “should” there is the should of broadly living a good life. The “should” in the gustatory case is the should of leading a good (or virtuous) gustatory life—one whereby you value sticking to your own likes.

<sup>46</sup>Of course, the utility of this point is limited. It is really part of the explanatory strategy I mentioned in note 19, where we “explain” Resistance by appeal to the faults of testiftees. Given that this strategy ascribes fault/mistake to ordinary tasters, it should play only a limited role in a full understanding of Resistance.

having the relevant gustatory experience is necessary for warrant via gustatory testimony, we should feel resistance in cases where testifiers do not share our likes because this makes it more likely that we will not have the relevant experiences, and we should feel less resistance when our likes are shared. The appeal to gustatory authenticity can allow for the same “predictions” in such cases: if testifiers do not share our likes, then we feel resistance because we want to structure our gustatory lives around our own (kinds of) tastes, not others’; and if testifiers share our likes, their testimony does not threaten our authenticity.

The appeal to authenticity can also accommodate an intuition behind the earlier objectivist explanation, which suggested that in cases where we value something like “intellectual autonomy,” we will feel the need to resist gustatory testimony because it does not provide us with “understanding-why.” The current explanation can allow such cases because it can appeal to the fact that gustatory authenticity can sometimes drive us to pursue the value of intellectual autonomy. Obtaining gustatory authenticity requires that we structure our gustatory lives around our own tastes. This in turn sometimes requires that we maintain beliefs that “cohere” with those tastes, and this sometimes requires that we do not just believe others without understanding why we ought to believe.<sup>47</sup> For if we believe others without understanding why we should believe what we are accepting, this may hinder the maintenance of our own tastes, since which tastes we think of as genuinely our own is responsive to our understanding of our reasons for thinking something delicious. We can thus feel the need to resist gustatory testimony because we are pursuing the value of intellectual autonomy *in* pursuing the value of gustatory authenticity.

Second, while allowing for some of the attraction of the skeptic’s explanation, the appeal to gustatory authenticity also avoids some of its troubles. Most obviously, since it is meant to be an objectivist-friendly explanation, it can appeal to the fact that when we do accept testimony, we do so by trusting those we think are reliable when it comes to detecting the truth about matters of taste, as well as the good reasons for thinking this or that about matters of taste. The objectivist, unlike the skeptic, has a very natural way of accommodating the difference between pursuing a recommendation or accepting a piece of testimony because the advisor or testifier has good taste and doing so merely because he has likes which happen to be the same as yours. There is thus no need for the objectivist to appeal to the shared likes of the “proper social milieu” or the “ideal critics.” There is then no need to take on the difficult task of defining the “ideal” critic (or the “ideal tasting conditions”) in terms that are completely independent of appeal to distinctively gustatory reasons.

Third, the appeal to gustatory authenticity also avoids the troubles of the previous objectivist explanation. Like the previous explanation, it can allow that accepting gustatory testimony can get us knowledge, just like other kinds of testimony. But first, unlike that explanation, it does not over-generalize. The value of gustatory authenticity is a *gustatory*

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<sup>47</sup>This may sound like it contradicts what I argued in Chapter 1: that if we do not want to bullshit, we ought to accord our tastes with our distinctively gustatory reasons, and not the other way around. But that *is* what we ought to do, if we are trying not to be bullshitters—or, more generally, if we are trying to fulfill epistemic norms. What is felt as “contradiction” here is again the *clash* between epistemic norms and the norms of authenticity.

value—it applies to our gustatory tastes; it is not a general epistemic value that applies whenever we face the question of what to believe. Second, the explanation here does not have trouble with the wine-seller example. If we suppress the value of intellectual autonomy, and we still feel that we need to resist testimony, we now have an easy explanation of this. In cases where intellectual autonomy is not at issue, still we can feel pulled by our value of gustatory authenticity and thus want to structure our gustatory lives around our own tastes instead of deferring to others.

Furthermore, the appeal to authenticity does not run into a parallel counter-example to the wine-seller example. That example was one in which I go to the wine-seller explicitly not caring about “understanding-why” some wine should be thought delicious, and yet we still sense a need to resist testimony. The parallel counter-example here would attempt to show that, if we suppress the value of gustatory authenticity, we would similarly still feel the need to resist. But I do not think it would work. Suppose, for example, that I convinced the wine-seller that I am trying to *form* my tastes in the first place—that I am simply not sure what I like, have no idea where to start, and so on.<sup>48</sup> In this case the wine-seller *should* be happy testifying in favor of some bottle, and I should feel no resistance to accepting such testimony (and believing him about what is good).<sup>49</sup> Or, perhaps I convinced the wine-seller that I just don’t care about wine because I prefer to expend my energies developing my own tastes in the world of beer; perhaps I need a recommendation just because I need the dinner party to be happy. In that case, I think the wine-seller should also be happy testifying, and I should not resist. The explanation appealing to authenticity gets these examples right, I think. Generalizing, we can say that we do not feel the need to resist testimony in cases where we seek it exactly because we do not have any idea yet of what to stick to, what to abide by, because we either haven’t formed our tastes yet (the value of authenticity is not applicable) or we have very nascent tastes that are not “fully our own” (the value is again not applicable), or when we care a lot more about educating our palates in accord with the actual gustatory reasons (the value is overridden).<sup>50</sup> These seem to me to be the proper exceptions to Resistance. Furthermore, many of these exceptions are catered to in our food practices: in reviews, classes, etc.

Finally, the explanation via gustatory authenticity also captures the relevant contrasts between matters of taste and other areas of discourse. As is desirable, a contrast can most clearly be drawn between matters of taste and ordinary empirical matters. It is obvious that for ordinary empirical matters, there is no standing value of being authentic with regard to one’s “tastes.” First of all, there are simply no “tastes” in the area of ordinary empirical matters (in the way that there is a body of gustatory likes and dislikes). Second of all, there

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<sup>48</sup>Notice that this is different than informing the wine-seller that I do not care about *forming my own opinions* about what tastes good.

<sup>49</sup>When I discussed this with my wine-seller, I asked him, “What about if I want to learn about what I like in the first place?” He responded, “Well, we could do that too.”

<sup>50</sup>Though, again, if we care more about respecting the reasons, independently of our own experiences, we may still have feelings that are associated with the value behind resistance, even when we do not actually resist.

is no analogous value of, e.g., structuring one's life around one's own beliefs. It is not a value to abide by your own beliefs just because they are your own.<sup>51</sup> The value of gustatory authenticity, however, does call for us to hang onto our likes and dislikes simply because they are our own (even if this does not at all mean we should hang onto them *come what may*).<sup>52</sup>

What about contrasts between matters of taste and ethics and aesthetics? If there is a parallel "resistance" worry that arises for the case of ethical testimony, it may be dealt with in ways that are not available in the case of gastronomy. For there is a practical dimension to ethical judgment that need not be as important in gustatory judgment. It is this: in order to act on the basis of the right kinds of reasons, one has to have a kind of understanding that may require one to go beyond mere ethical testimony (and so to resist accepting some ethical belief merely on the basis of testimony). Furthermore, it is often itself an important and distinctively *ethical* matter not just to do the right thing but also to do it *for the right reasons*, and this may require understanding those reasons as reasons. So the earlier objectivist explanation appealing to the value of "understanding-why" may do better for the case of ethics than it does for the case of matters of taste.<sup>53</sup>

There is perhaps most similarity between gastronomy and aesthetics on the matter of resistance to testimony, as I suggested in discussing Gorodeisky's solution to the parallel aesthetics issue. Aesthetics is another paradigm example in which we must deal with a body of likes and dislikes, or aesthetic "tastes." And it seems similarly right to think that we value forming and abiding by our own aesthetic tastes because they are ours or because we value having our own. This parallel may seem fantastic to those who are influenced by Kant's famously contrasting beauty with "mere taste." So I want to end my discussion here with a possible remaining contrast between aesthetics and gastronomy.

Although I used Gorodeisky's account as a springboard for my own attempt at an explanation in the taste case, it is clear that there is a difference in content between the values considered. According to Gorodeisky, aesthetic matters "call for appreciation": "We need...to take pleasure in it [aesthetic objects] and be aware that this pleasure is required of us: that it is *merited* by the form of the object that gives rise to the harmony of the faculties." (2010, p. 67, my italics) She appeals to the value of appreciating what *calls for*

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<sup>51</sup>Of course, you must act according to your own beliefs and no-one else's, and you will believe things that you think follow from your own beliefs, and so on. These facts need to be true of you insofar as you are a "good" believer. But they are true of you because a good believer aims at forming his beliefs according to the truth, not according to whether they happen to be his own. And as mentioned before, that there is such a thing as intellectual autonomy is not incompatible with the point here. Having such autonomy is a kind of epistemic skill involved in understanding for oneself why something is so. It is to "see for oneself," but importantly, it is also to see *what's true* for oneself. (This does not mean intellectual autonomy is reducible to the desire to maximize true beliefs.)

<sup>52</sup>Notice that the case of color does not cause trouble for the explanation here. For once again, there are no relevant body of "tastes," and there is no value of hanging onto one's color beliefs simply by dint of their being one's own. Furthermore, there does not seem to be an analogous value of abiding by the deliverances one's own perceptual mechanisms just because they are one's own.

<sup>53</sup>This kind of solution to the ethical case is pursued by McGrath (forthcoming).

appreciation. In contrast, I appeal to the value of just *having* one's own gustatory tastes. There is a difference between pursuing the appreciation of what is "to-be-appreciated," and pursuing the structuring of one's life around one's own tastes and experiences. So, for example, even if some gustatory testimony actually helps you appreciate some gustatory item, *still* you might feel resistance to it because you value abiding by our own tastes. And it is plausible that you can maintain gustatory authenticity without abiding by the more stringent demand that you appreciate all that calls for appreciation. Deliciousness is not as demanding as beauty in that way.

We can thus maintain a contrast between aesthetics and matters of gustatory taste by insisting that aesthetic testimony involves both a value of aesthetic authenticity and a value of what we can simply call "appreciation"—the value of appreciating what "calls for" appreciation; whereas gustatory testimony involves only the former value.<sup>54</sup> *This* contrast, however, would not be a reason to think we should be skeptics about "distinctively gustatory reasons."

## 2.8 Reluctance and Advice

That completes my attempt to give a plausible alternative to the skeptic's explanation of one of the phenomena I started with in the beginning of the chapter. I think the appeal I have made to gustatory authenticity can do the requisite work in giving plausible alternatives to skeptical explanations of Reluctance and Wariness as well, though I will be relatively brief in sketching them in this section.

Once we accept that the value of gustatory authenticity is the source of our feeling of Resistance, there is no bar to accepting that it also explains Reluctance—the sense that we should not judge a matter of taste until we ourselves have had the relevant gustatory experiences. Valuing "being true" to our own tastes is a matter of structuring our gustatory lives according to our own tastes, and one way of doing so is by going ahead and judging and acting on the basis of those tastes. If we feel we ought to do that to pursue such a value, then we will feel reluctant not to do it, and that just is the feeling we have when we sense that we should not judge a matter of taste until we ourselves have had the relevant experiences. On this score, our explanation does as well as the skeptic's. The skeptic's explanation has it that having reason to judge some gustatory matter depends on one's own tastes—likes and dislikes. According to that explanation, just as we risk not having epistemic right to a judgment if we rely on testimony, so we risk not having such right if we judge without having yet tasted. Analogously, according to the explanation being defended here, just as we risk not valuing authenticity if we rely on testimony, so we risk not valuing authenticity if we judge without relying on our own tastes. Both explanations should allow exceptions, and they both can. If we are certain our tastes would issue forth in the relevant experiences

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<sup>54</sup>This seems to me to allow for the fact that beautiful things stop us in our tracks and demand our attention in a way that delicious things do not, unless we independently care about good food and drink (or we are hungry).

were we to taste ourselves, even though we have not yet tasted, that should not be a risk to authenticity (or one's epistemic right to the judgment).<sup>55</sup>

This extension to cover Reluctance also gives us another way of responding to the “hardcore” subjectivist's sense that there is never a real exception to Resistance. To put it lightly, I have been explaining Resistance with exceptions “squarely in mind.” So, I have emphasized examples where we feel resistance (or not) to testimony while figuring out what to try and taste. But the real problem, a hardcore subjectivist was insisting before, is that even if I do “base my actions” on such testimony, I still do not believe on the basis of the testimony (ever). One piece of evidence for this may be that after I “take” a recommendation, I do not often turn around and tell another person, “That is delicious.” I have already given my reasons for thinking we should allow the exceptions. But I think we can now also note that the worry here may be, not about Resistance, but about Reluctance: feeling reluctant to judge something without having experienced for oneself would exhibit itself in our not turning around telling another person, “That is delicious.” And I do not see why the appeal to authenticity, *if* it works for Resistance, cannot be extended to Reluctance. There is risk of gustatory inauthenticity in judging without having experienced. If we would not want to make such judgments, even if we *have* to because of overriding epistemic demands, we would not want to flatly express such judgments to others; hence the common hesitation: “It might be delicious (given what I've heard).”<sup>56</sup>

If one continues to insist that there is something *special* about the intuition of Reluctance, beyond that of Resistance, the objectivist has one last explanatory resource at his disposal. If a person judges a gustatory matter without having tasted the relevant items, the objectivist is happy reminding us that the person's judgment might be unjustified. After all—what reason does he think there is for thinking the item is delicious? How could he pick out the deliciousness-relevant features unless he has tasted the item, or similar items, or at least knows what they would taste like and how he would like or experience them were he to taste them? If he has no answers to these questions, then he is simply making a judgment without any good reason; of course we are reluctant to do that. And if the answer is, “A reliable testifier told me so,” then there is in fact nothing special about the intuition beyond what we detect in feeling Resistance.

The phenomenon of Wariness about giving and taking advice is only slightly more complicated. Notice that much advice is given by testifying that certain gustatory matters

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<sup>55</sup>Of course, the same conflicts between epistemic and gustatory value would show up here as it did in the case of Resistance. However, in the case of Reluctance, this conflict may show up less often, given that we are not dealing with other people. For when we are just trying to judge what is delicious by ourselves, will often just rely on our own tastes because we think they are reliable (more on this in Chapter 4). We might be wrong about this, but we also are not often faced with the realization of that, so there may be less conflict with the gustatory value in these cases.

<sup>56</sup>Perhaps there is a worry about the difference between resisting the *acceptance* of testimony and resisting the *giving* of testimony. Resisting the giving of testimony is not *quite* the same as Reluctance. However, I do not see how it poses a special worry. We resist giving testimony because we feel Reluctance. We may also have extra qualms about promoting inauthenticity in others, as I suggest for Wariness below.

are so, so part of Wariness can be dealt with in the same way as Resistance.<sup>57</sup> We value structuring our gustatory lives around our own tastes and so resist undue influence from others—this is why we feel resistance towards testimony, whether as a form of advice or not. Wariness about giving advice does not seem to be an expression of anything more worrisome that would warrant skepticism about gustatory reasons. A simple appeal to our wanting to promote the value of authenticity would allow us to explain why we are wary of giving advice to others—why pressure them with our own opinions when we should be allowing them to maintain their own tastes?<sup>58</sup> Once again, these explanations seem to leave the right amount room for the relevant exceptions. Sometimes we do take advice. There are gustatory recommendations we gladly, even sometimes blindly, follow, whether because the norm or value of authenticity is overridden or already/easily satisfied.<sup>59</sup>

There *is* a separate question lurking behind the phenomenon of Wariness—this is the general question about how to understand nature of reasons when it seems that we limit the scope of our advice giving-and-taking. For instance, we want to give advisees *good* reasons to do this or that, but we also know that a bad way of giving advice is by telling the advisee reasons she ought to do something that are completely “out of reach” for her.<sup>60</sup> We also give “advice” about what a person “ought to” believe, and there is some sense in which if you give “advisees” reasons to believe something that are entirely out of their reach, you are giving at least a form of bad advice. All of this means that we need to come up with a good, general account of how advice-giving works, but that is a general problem; advice-giving does not seem to give rise to any *specific* skeptical worry about gustatory reasons.

## 2.9 What About Freeness?

I have so far left open the question of what to do with the datum of Freeness: the sense some have that we can more easily judge matters “merely” on the basis of our own gustatory experiences. One way the skeptic about distinctively gustatory reasons finds this datum important is by adding to it the following pointed question: “So, according to you, objectivist, is it as if our own gustatory experiences were somehow authoritative?” The idea behind the pointed question is that anyone who wants to respect the sense that we freely

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<sup>57</sup>Sometimes we advise another person to try something because she might enjoy it. A subjectivist should be happy allowing that we feel no hesitation giving this form of advice. An objectivist can allow the form of advice as well, as long as it is not construed as the *only* form.

<sup>58</sup>Here there is not a straightforward conflict with epistemic norms. There would be conflict between promoting authenticity and, not believing what is true, but telling others the (whole) truth; between authenticity and honesty.

<sup>59</sup>Reluctance and Wariness are close, but they can come apart. Perhaps there is an advisee who has had the relevant experiences, but I have not, and then I try to advise/judge something merely on the basis of testimony. In this case, I think, we do not feel Wariness but we still feel Reluctance. If the advisee has the relevant experiences, I do no harm passing along what I heard from another. But I can do this while still feeling the pull of Reluctance—for myself, so to speak.

<sup>60</sup>These are reasons she cannot reach from a “sound deliberative route.” Williams’ famous skeptical discussion of externalist moral reasons brings this general question to the fore. (Williams, 1979)



judge on the basis of our own experiences while *not* attributing to ourselves what Hume (1757) called “the highest arrogance and self-conceit” in matters of gustation, then we must think that gustatory reasons are subjectivist—merely sourced in our likes and dislikes. For if gustatory reasons are *not* sourced in our own subjective states, then we seem committed to thinking that each of us thinks that our own gustatory experiences “track” good reasons for thinking the truth of the matter in this area. And that amounts to a kind of “chauvinism” because it seems to ignore known anthropological facts: that humans have differing tastes, likes and dislikes—that there is a “contest of sentiment.” Call this kind of dilemma the skeptic’s “charge of chauvinism” against the objectivist.

The skeptic’s Acquaintance Principle was meant to give us a sense that we *have* to appeal to our own experiences in judging matters of taste. The skeptic’s charge of chauvinism does not try to insist that we *have* to appeal to our own experiences—it only points out that we act as if appeal to our own experiences were nearly *sufficient* to judge matters of taste, and then forces an objectivist to puzzle over this fact. It is puzzling, the skeptic suggests, not only because we know how different we are in our tastes, but also because we know that we do not exhibit such Freeness when we judge matters of color, which we similarly detect through our senses. Faced with a contrary judgment of color based on what another judge claims to be a different experience, we back off and wonder if we really made the correct judgment. So goes the puzzle.

That is one source of the skeptical worry that appeals to Freeness. In the next chapter, I will deal with this source by construing it as a matter of worrying about how we deal with taste *disputes*. Of course, the charge of chauvinism does not require us to consider judges actually *engaged* in a dispute (at the moment of judgment), but it does seem to presuppose that judges are aware that there are people who would disagree with them.

It is not entirely clear whether there are other sources of a skeptical worry that is generated around Freeness. To see this, note that it is not a worry, *all by itself*, that gustatory experiences of enjoyment are “enough” of a basis on which to judge matters of taste. For surely it cannot be claimed that simply having some such bare enjoyment is *sufficient* for warranted gustatory judgment. There are obvious counter-examples: having negative experiences when we eat with a head cold does not warrant us to negatively judge what we are eating. Once we admit such counter-examples, however, it is hard to see in what clear sense our own experiences are really “enough” of a basis. It is not as if the counter-examples are easily manageable. For example, let us take Hume’s list of characteristics of a critic of good aesthetic taste and adapt them to our purposes. Hume thought that “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle” a critic to be a “true judge.” Perhaps being in the proper position to judge gustatory matters is not as difficult as being in such a position to judge aesthetic matters. Still, at least a gustatory “critic” needs to practice (or else we could make no sense of acquired tastes), know how to basically compare, and be cleared from radical prejudice (like finding peasant foods disgusting because one finds peasants disgusting). It *initially* seems, then, that it is *far* from enough to rest only on your “gustatory experiences” to judge matters of taste, if that just means resting on what you happen to like or enjoy,

understood independently of characteristics you have as a “true judge.”<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, in the beginning of the chapter, I cited as part of the “Freeness data” that it sounds odd to say, “I really like [hate] this tuna nigiri, but I should reserve judgment about whether it is delicious.” I have heard philosophers say that this sounds odd. I confess I do not detect much oddness here. In fact, it seems to me that if you have tasted enough foods that have required some effort to appreciate, you will find the sentiment being expressed with the statement decidedly normal.

*Beyond* the issue about taste disputes and the charge of chauvinism, I think it is unclear there is a genuine “Freeness worry.” Though I am skeptical that there is a non-question-begging worry to be had here, I will try anyway to make sense of one in the final chapter by looking at the making and evaluating taste assertions, as it has been understood by some subjectivists.

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<sup>61</sup>There are other, benign senses in which your gustatory experiences may be “enough” for judgment. First, you have nothing much else to go on to judge. Clearly, an objectivist can accept this. Second, all we need for correct judgment are experiences as of, say, something being well-balanced and flavorful (to the point of being delicious). As mentioned before, the skeptic is probably thinking of ‘gustatory experience’ in a thinner sense. I will say more about the issue of “sufficiency” in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 3

# Dialectically Ineffective Taste Disagreements

### 3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I suggested that one motivation for skepticism about distinctively gustatory reasons is the “Freeness worry,” the thought that the objectivist has trouble explaining the sense we have that we especially “freely” judge matters of taste. I also suggested that one way this worry is brought out is by raising the “chauvinism” worry for objectivism: the worry that objectivism cannot make sense of our freely coming out with gustatory judgments in the face of widespread disagreement. In fact there are two phenomena associated with our attitudes about taste judgments in relation to the chauvinism worry. The first is the freeness—this is the “ease” by which we continue to judge matters of taste despite the fact, of which we are presumably aware, that others seem to radically disagree with us. The second is related: not only do we go about freely judging in spite of taste disputes, we think others go about freely judging as well, and we think we are both “within our rights” to freely judge—we are not “doing anything wrong,” in some sense (to be laid out by either the subjectivist or objectivist explanation of the phenomenon). I will call this the “allowing” of others’ assertions. If we think we are not doing anything wrong in freely judge ourselves, it seems reasonable to think that we should “allow” others to freely judge as well.<sup>1</sup>

The subjectivist accuses the objectivist of being unable to explain “Ease” and “Allowance” without attributing chauvinism to ordinary taste judges. The subjectivist thinks that both Ease and Allowance should be explained in terms of a sense of epistemic warrant

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<sup>1</sup>Allowance piggybacks on Ease; it is the latter that is more important here. However, I think it is plausible that if we do not think other asserters are “within their right” to exhibit Ease, we should be skeptical of our own right to do so, and that thinking we are so skeptical mischaracterizes Ease.

It is nevertheless an open question what “being within our right” means here. The question is pressing because we *also*, I think, have the intuition that in fact we go ahead and *criticize* others’ assertions/judgments when we disagree with them. This may seem to be in tension with thinking that asserters are “within their right” to freely judge. I will set this issue aside until Chapter 4.

that the objectivist cannot allow—i.e., one that is skeptical of “distinctively” gustatory reasons. In this chapter, I will not argue against the subjectivist’s explanation, but I will argue that objectivists need not uncharitably attribute widespread chauvinism to ordinary taste disagreeers in order to explain Ease and Allowance.

My strategy will be as follows. First, I will try to delineate more carefully the challenge against objectivism. Taking the challenge against objectivism seriously means taking it in a way that does not make it look *obviously* question-begging against the objectivist. And this requires, I think, a solid attempt at characterizing—without just defining in subjectivist terms—the kind of “intractable” disagreement that subjectivists often seem to worry about. This is what I spend the first part of the paper doing. Not only will it motivate the challenge; it will also later help me say why I think we can meet the challenge, or at least see in what ways the challenge is really, *unobviously*, question-begging. Taking the challenge seriously also means laying out plausible criteria for a good explanation of Ease and Allowance, which I will also do.

Second, I take the thus characterized class of disagreements and argue that what is worrisome about them need not be that they run us into *epistemic* risk, as the skeptic wants to force the objectivist to say, but rather that they run us into *dialectical* risk. Taste disagreements force objectivists, not to accept epistemic skepticism or attribute chauvinism, but rather to accept that dialectical effectiveness can be divorced from warrant in certain situations, and to accept as a result that we cannot do our rational best when it comes to taste disputes. It is awareness of a certain kind of dialectical ineffectiveness, especially prominent when it comes to gustatory matters—and not obliviousness to epistemic ineffectiveness—that results in Ease and Allowance.

Finally, I will consider a remaining worry: can the objectivist really *just* point to a distinction between epistemic risk and dialectical risk and not say anything “positive” to show why we should believe that there is no epistemic risk? For my theoretical project here—engaged in the task of finding motivations in our gustatory practices to go the subjectivist way—I think: yes, he can. However, I will still try to temper—but only temper—the inevitable intellectual dissatisfaction of this response by pointing to two facts that are revealed when we characterize the kinds of intractable disagreements we are worried about. First, we only see what counts as intractable taste disagreement against a background of widespread taste agreement—this tempers a disposition towards epistemic skepticism. Second, we have a practice-internal conception of what counts as *chauvinism* (or bias or the like), and we can use it to see that we are not chauvinistic all the time—this can then be used to suggest that we are not in situations of epistemic risk all the time.

If there is a remaining worry here, it stems, I think, from “direct” worries about the epistemology of taste judgment. This is not surprising. Throughout these chapters, worries about objectivism and distinctively gustatory reasons can shortcut examination of our practices and arise from “direct” worries about the metaphysics of gustatory properties and the epistemology of encountering them. Aside from ejecting such considerations from my project, I will suggest that such a “direct” epistemic worry is just a general one. Even if it is a legitimate worry, there is still no worry specific to the gustatory case. So it has still not

been shown that there is anything *especially* problematic about gustatory matters such that they are to count as the *paradigmatic* cases of subjective matters.

## 3.2 Which Are the Problematic Taste Disagreements?

What is supposed to be so damning to the objectivist about our unhesitatingly or “freely” relying on our own taste experiences when judging whether something is delicious is that we would supposedly know better if matters of deliciousness were really objective matters of fact. We would know that our own experiences are probably not a reliable guide to what is really good since there are just so many people who disagree with us on the basis of their own taste experiences. These disagreements are not merely cross-cultural, but also cross-personal—even your close brother might think succotash is delicious while you do not. What could, according to the objectivist, explain our freely relying on our own experiences in the face of such disagreement other than the fact that we are blindingly chauvinistic? This is how the worry goes, intuitively. I will now try to spell it out.

In Chapter 2, I suggested that the bare idea that we judge matters of taste just on the basis of our taste experiences is not very forceful as a worry against objectivism, since we do not find it *simply* sufficient for properly judging a matter of taste on the basis of our taste experiences, and even if we do rely on our own taste experiences, we do so in all areas of inquiry in which we rely on our senses.<sup>2</sup> A real worry here is, however, generated by the thought that an objectivist has to think of ordinary judges as undertaking extraordinary “epistemic risk” when they judge in the face of the great potential for certain kinds of difficult-to-resolve disagreements, and then just ignoring that risk by asserting/judging what they do anyway. The objectivist, it is thought, has to think of us uncharitably instead of

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<sup>2</sup>As I mentioned in Chapter 2, a related issue here is the question of what the content of “taste experience” is. Some ways of thinking about the content of such experiences will falsify the claim above that experiences are not simply sufficient for properly judging matters of taste. For instance, if a typical taste experience were something like the experience of ‘the flavorful, complex, rich but balanced taste of a soup,’ then perhaps experience *is* simply sufficient to warrant the judgment that the soup tastes great. But if that is what a typical taste experience were like, then there would also be no skeptical bite behind the idea that such experiences are sufficient for warranted gustatory judgment, since such experiences exactly seem to presuppose the detection of features relevant to whether or not the item tasted is delicious—i.e., distinctively gustatory reasons.

Instead of talking of “personal experiences” being “sufficient” (or not) for judgment, we might avoid the above issue by discussing the Freeness worry in terms of freely judging on the basis of one’s own “gustatory sensibilities,” where those sensibilities are understood as something like the “standards” for correctly judging some gustatory item’s deliciousness. We can abstractly think of these standards as just grouping delicious items with each other; and non-delicious ones with each other. The subjectivist can further understand the mechanism of such grouping in terms of “tastes”—personal likes and dislikes, perhaps. The non-subjectivist can understand it as something more—e.g., (hedged, perhaps non-reductive) “principles” that move us from features of items to valencies of deliciousness. Of course, if we go this route, we raise other difficult issues about how to understand *any* “standard” of judgment. (For some difficulties understanding epistemic standards, see (Boghossian, 2006). For some difficulties understanding moral standards, construed as principles, see (Dancy, 2004). The idea that judgment always requires the “following” of a standard also recalls the more general worries raised by Wittgenstein’s “rule-following considerations.”)

just allowing, as the subjectivist might, that the disputing asserters/judgers are equally “warranted,” relative to their own tastes.

But before we can address the Freeness worry understood in this way, we have to get clearer on what kind of taste disagreements we are worried about. It is far from obvious.<sup>3</sup> It is common to suggest that the potential disagreements that are worrisome are the ones that are “intractable.” It is, however, difficult to characterize such intractability without just begging the question against the objectivist. Some suggest that subjectivism about gustatory matters is motivated by the supposed “faultlessness” of taste disagreement. But characterizing “faultlessness” more carefully requires finding an elusive middle ground between a notion that an objectivist would be perfectly happy with—such as that of all the disputants being ‘reasonable,’ ‘rational,’ or ‘blameless’—and a notion that *just* presupposes some kind of subjectivism—such as that of the disputants each being ‘correct at their own contexts of use/assessment’ or ‘warranted relative to their own tastes.’

It does not help, for instance, to characterize “faultless” disagreements as ones where the disputants are “not making a mistake” or do not exhibit any “cognitive shortcoming” in standing by their conflicting positions.<sup>4</sup> For if a mistake is thought of as a belief in something false, then the disputants seem to be able to believe contradictory things in a way that is nevertheless each correct—this picture just rules out from the get-go the form of objectivism I have been defending. And if cognitive shortcoming is instead thought of in terms of notions of “reasonableness” and the like, then unless it is a notion that is perfectly consistent with objectivism, it is likely that it is being thought of in terms of some notion that is very much like “correctness at their respective contexts,” which again just begs the question against objectivism. The challenge, again, is to find a “happy medium.” I am not suggesting this is impossible. However, it seems to me that one will describe controversial or difficult-to-resolve taste disagreements as “faultless” in this way, and search for that happy medium, only if one is already motivated to think that this area of discourse must be not-fully-objectivist. Since for the project I am engaged in here, I am not (yet) motivated to think that this area of discourse must be not-fully-objective, I want to first try a different tactic on behalf of the skeptic. Let us just characterize various kinds of intuitively difficult-to-resolve, pointless, misguided, confused, or otherwise problematic taste disagreements, and see if there is anything there that seems to cause worry for objectivism. In Chapter 4, I will return to the question of whether we can find some other concrete phenomenon to make sense of so-called “faultlessness.”

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<sup>3</sup>Enoch (2009) surveys “arguments from disagreement” against moral realism. As he argues, most of the ones surveyed are implausible. The argument here from “intractable disagreement” is close to some of the more plausible ones he surveys, but his reasons for rejecting them are not quite mine.

<sup>4</sup>This is the kind of strategy is pursued in (Wright, 1992) (but see the qualifications in (Wright, 2001, 2006)); and Kölbel’s discussions motivating relativism, e.g., (Kölbel, 2003).

### 3.3 Varieties of Confusion: Irrelevance and Pluralism

When I speak of gustatory disagreements getting mired in confusion, I am thinking of ways in which such disagreements become (or, more realistically, get closer to becoming) dialectically pointless. Disagreements can lose their practical point, as when, for instance, engaging in or resolving a disagreement is a terrible way of getting the disputants to coordinate their interests or sign a treaty. Disagreements lose what might be thought of as their “normative” point when continuing them would inevitably violate the various norms that centrally govern them—these are norms that characterize disagreements as a practice.<sup>5</sup> One such norm is that disagreements should aim at resolution; another is that such resolution result in knowledge for the disputants; another is that the disputants resolve their disagreements by giving justifications for legitimately challenged positions (rather than by, say, bonking each other on the head, and not in response to, say, ad hominem attacks). There are probably others.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that these sorts of norms can be violated in a number of ways; in particular, they can be violated just in virtue of the nature of the reasons being given-and-taken in the dispute. Take, for instance, the subjectivist who is motivated by the seeming “faultlessness” of taste disagreement. This supposed faultlessness would exhibit itself as the in-principle inability of disputants to resolve a disagreement via the giving of reasons (as opposed to, say, the “brute” changing of tastes). If the subjectivist is correct, then this would be one way in which taste disagreements may be more “pointless” than other disagreements. Below I present less theoretically-characterized ways in which taste disagreements seem to become “pointless” or run the danger of becoming so, and ways in which they do so that do not indicate that gustatory reasons cannot be passed along discursively. It is only by understanding pointlessness that does not so indicate that we begin to understand what kind of pointlessness might so indicate.

To start, we can note that actual taste disagreement is rife with clear irrelevancies. This occurs in disagreements about both what item is being judged and whether the item tastes good.<sup>7</sup> On the side of something’s tasting good or not, one can mix up whether something tastes good, and whether it is good for one, in the sense of its promoting one’s health or well-being. One can also confuse what actually tastes good with the pleasures of memory;

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<sup>5</sup>We can think of them as constitutive aims, norms, or goals; or even non-constitutive but characteristic ones.

<sup>6</sup>I want to remain neutral on the question of whether there is a single, overarching norm here.

<sup>7</sup>Throughout this rough map of misguided taste disagreements, I will try to give examples of disagreements about what item is being judged as well as disagreements about whether the item tastes good. The former kinds of taste disagreements are typically ignored in the contemporary literature on matters of taste. It is important to keep the two kinds of disagreements separate; it may be that disagreements about what is being judged are in some ways subjective—dependent on our classificatory interests, say—even while those very things being delicious or not is not in any way subjective. (However, I think it would be a Pyrrhic victory for the objectivist if it turns out that there is absolutely nothing objective about what count as gustatory items—if what is commonly thought to be subjective element of deliciousness is just completely “transferred over” to the individuation of dishes.)

the pleasures of expectation; or the pleasures of one's environment.<sup>8</sup> Also, everyone (at least everyone who has ever read any Yelp reviews) is familiar with how difficult it can be to separate the quality of a restaurant's customer service from the goodness of its food. And anyone familiar with the ridiculous, over-the-top luxury that can come with food and drink knows that the desire to consume things that make one feel rich, powerful, elite or "authentic" can overwhelm (or pose as) a desire to have actually good meals.<sup>9</sup> If these sorts of irrelevant considerations infect a disagreement, the disagreement seems to involve one party (or both) missing the point, or less being able to resolve the disagreement in appropriate ways.

For an example of such irrelevancies on the side of adjudicating what it is one is tasting, consider a silly debate about whether some item really is a hot dog, in which one party claims that it is not a hot dog because it has ketchup on it. Here is a reason he might give: "No self-respecting Chicagoan would ever think of putting ketchup on a hot dog."<sup>10</sup> But whether ketchup is added on a hot dog is clearly irrelevant to its being a hot dog. The disagreement here is stunted by the disputant's irrelevant convictions about what a "good Chicagoan" does to a hot dog.<sup>11</sup> For another example, consider discussing how one is to "properly" eat nigiri sushi if one wants to maintain its integrity while eating it. Here it might be easy for someone to slide from talking about whether to soak nigiri in soy sauce and slather it with wasabi (no!) to talking about whether to use chopsticks to eat the nigiri or whether to wear a kimono while eating it (irrelevant!). Even though only the former would clearly express a legitimate concern for how to maintain the integrity of the food item, in both cases you might hear claims like, "If you do *that*, you will *destroy* it!"

Another way misguided disagreements can arise is when disputants have difficulty seeing that an argument stems from the two parties not realizing that there is more than one way

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<sup>8</sup>In a single book, food writer Anthony Bourdain seems to exemplify the latter three confusions:

"When you're shivering under four blankets in a Moroccan hotel room, the perfect meal can be something no more exotic than breakfast at Barney Greengrass back in New York—the one you had four months ago. Your last Papaya King hot dog takes on golden, even mythic, proportions when remembered from a distance." (Bourdain, 2002, p. 272)

"When you're eating simple barbecue under a palm tree, and you feel sand between your toes, samba music is playing softly in the background, waves are lapping at the shore a few yards off, a gentle breeze is cooling the sweat on the back of your neck at the hairline, and looking across the table, past the column of empty Red Stripes at the dreamy expression on your companion's face, you realize that in half an hour you're probably going to be having sex on clean white hotel sheets, that grilled chicken leg suddenly tastes a hell of a lot better." (Bourdain, 2002, pp. 6–7)

<sup>9</sup>My favorite examples of this can be found on the Internet under press headings like "the most expensive foods in the world": for instance, a 1,000-dollar white truffle bagel with gold flakes and a 25,000-dollar dessert served in a dish encrusted in diamonds.

<sup>10</sup>This is a comment from a news story: [http://sports.yahoo.com/mlb/blog/big\\_league\\_stew/post/Hot-Dog-MLB-ballparks-to-serve-almost-22-millio?urn=mlb-152391](http://sports.yahoo.com/mlb/blog/big_league_stew/post/Hot-Dog-MLB-ballparks-to-serve-almost-22-millio?urn=mlb-152391).

<sup>11</sup>Incidentally, the example also illustrates how breezily people can move from debating about what they think would make something taste good, and whether they think it is the thing at all, in the first place. The disagreement above would not have been stunted if the disputant's point was just that ketchup overwhelms the taste of the meat in a hot dog, so the hot dog with ketchup would not taste its best. So said another, more sensible comment (though it still does not manage to avoid the Chicago pride): "Ketchup is too sweet and it overpowers the taste of the hot dog. We just don't do that sort of thing here in Chicago."



in the vicinity in which something can be delicious or disgusting, taste good or bad. This is a failure to see the *plurality* of gustatory goods.<sup>12</sup> It is common, for instance, for a food item that is differently paired with others to be equally good, or good in different ways. Peanut butter with jelly is differently good than peanut butter with chocolate. Or one can eat a dish in one way and have it result in being good in one way, and to eat it in another way and have it result in being differently good (e.g., progressing from the lighter to the heavier ingredients in a single dish might result in something differently delicious than eating the ingredients mixed together, all at once). I suspect some actual debates in the public discourse on cuisine would benefit from parties realizing that there is more than one way in the vicinity in which something can taste good. For instance, sometimes one encounters debates about whether the trickeries involved in so-called “molecular gastronomy” are better or worse than the more traditional cooking of regional foods or classic haute cuisine. The debate here involves quite a number of intricacies, given the variety of techniques involved in molecular gastronomy, and the variety of issues touched upon when judging how good such cuisine is.<sup>13</sup> However, we can see without getting into too many details that inventive, surprising, even avant-garde cooking can probably share equal gustatory value with carefully-executed, conservative, comfortable regional cooking. And once we do, some of this debate will seem misguided.

Disputes involving what is actually being tasted can similarly end up seeming misguided once the plurality of some set of gustatory values are recognized. For it is often the case that debating over whether some dish is what it is involves adjudicating what counts as doing it well. For instance, one might consider some instance of “Italian pizza” in San Francisco and wonder whether it really so counts, given that it is not quite as thin, and perhaps its ingredients are not quite so classic. One might start out arguing that it really is Italian pizza (and hence a poorly-executed instance of it), but if one becomes convinced that it tastes as good, or, rather, good in a different way, then one will perhaps just think of it as not quite Italian pizza, but rather Italian pizza with a California cuisine twist. When one encountered “gourmet” burgers for the first time—one with an English muffin bun, herbed aioli, capers and zucchini pickles; or one with Kobe beef, foie gras, black truffles and truffle sauce<sup>14</sup>—one

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<sup>12</sup>Just as moral objectivism should be compatible with a plurality of (possibly incommensurable) moral goods, so should taste objectivism be compatible with a plurality of (possibly incommensurable) gustatory goods. However, it would be a thin objectivism that is compatible with too extreme of a “pluralism”—e.g., if “pluralism” were the view that every single item tasted has its own set of “valid” criteria by which to judge its deliciousness. This would be similar to the Pyrrhic victory for objectivism I spoke of in note 7. I discuss the plurality of gustatory goods more in Chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup>Here is just one example of these intricacies. Molecular gastronomical techniques can involve playing with how dishes are served, with one-off custom serviceware sometimes being made to create certain effects. One might think this mere trickery across the board (the great *show* with your dinner doesn’t make your *dinner* great). But it really depends on the particular technique. There are differences between being served a piece of food on a shocking, dangerous-looking metal skewer; being served something in a specially-prepared dish that carefully separates the hot and cold elements in it until the very moment of consumption; and being served a soluble flavor-infused paper to press on the roof of your mouth before eating a dish. (All three examples are from Grant Achatz’ *Alinea* restaurant.)

<sup>14</sup>The first is from Spruce in San Francisco; the second a Hubert Keller creation served at his Las Vegas

might have argued for or against the fancy things being burgers, full stop. Are they just better-tasting burgers, or are they such wildly made “burgers”—an *English muffin*?—that they do not count as burgers at all? But with some exposure and deliberation, it is more likely that one concludes rather that both the classic burger and the gourmet burger have its place—that they are both burgers in some sense, but that they are also distinguished by being differently-good-tasting kinds of burgers. The Kobe patties radically change the texture and feel of the classic burger, but they are good nevertheless; lots of truffles are undeniably good, even if the patties do not have the simple beefy texture of the classic.<sup>15</sup>

Now, if the worry that objectivism must attribute massive chauvinism to ordinary taste disagreeers has its motivation in the potential for “problematic” taste disagreements involving unnoticed irrelevancies or unseen pluralism, then the worry against objectivism is not very strong. However, the fact that we also have *controversial* such disagreements gets us closer to a reasonable worry against objectivism that rests on the potential for problematic taste disagreements, for it raises the question of how we could go about *settling* the controversy.

For instance, there are a variety of ways of being irrelevant, some less blameworthy than others. If in adjudicating a matter of taste, you seriously cite as a good reason the dish’s having a name that has the same first letter as that of an old pet, you are producing an irrelevancy that is idiosyncratic and easily dismissible. However, there are more understandable and more common ways of introducing potential irrelevancies. One of them is by using (intentionally or not) taste disagreement as a cover for certain conflicts of interests that reside in or near the world of food and drink. I have already given examples; the case above regarding the etiquette of what utensils to use may count as a desire to enforce social conformity presented as a taste disagreement. I also mentioned interests involving one’s socio-economic status. A debate about whether a thousand-dollar “bagel” should really count as a bagel might involve people who find the excess of luxury despicable trying their best to disassociate its despicableness from their comfort foods. We also have examples here on the side of disputing about the goodness of some agreed-upon item. It may be that the only reason you find some barbeque ribs disgusting is that your sense of etiquette has been violated by someone’s shoving them in (and around) his mouth. Or it may be that you find caviar disgusting only because you find rich people disgusting.

But once we recognize that certain charges are more common or more reasonable than others, we should also be able to find cases that are controversial to describe as ones involving irrelevancies. To think of some factor in a taste dispute as involving an irrelevancy (e.g., as being really a matter of someone’s parochial interests or purposes) requires assuming certain standards regarding what counts as relevant to determining the truth of a taste judgment. And of course there will be cases where there is disagreement about those standards. Go back, for example, to my examples of comforting memory, sexual expectation, and bad

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restaurant.

<sup>15</sup>Actually, it may be just a plainly bad idea to use Kobe beef for hamburgers; radically changing the texture of the classic burger sounds like a way of failing to be a burger. Still, one can think this while still thinking, say, the aioli served on some gourmet burgers makes for a differently good item than a simple ketchup-topped cheeseburger.

customer service. What about similar examples involving food cravings or the presentation of the dish? Are those obviously irrelevant to deciding whether some dish tastes good or not? Or, take the etiquette case again. Sure, how politely you eat something does not have anything to do with how it tastes; but there is more to methods of eating than eating politely. If you swallow your food whole without chewing or gulp your wine without breathing, you are clearly not going to be consuming in such a way that gets you the relevant flavors. But there are also unclear cases: drinking your soup from the bowl in big mouthfuls versus dainty sips with a spoon; eating a fall dish with skewers made from the smoking twigs of an oak tree versus regular wood skewers; eating very spicy hot-pot outside in the sun versus inside in the cold. Also, consider my accusation that certain debates about outlandishly expensive bagels are merely conflicts of socio-economic interests. What about what food writers sometimes describe as the “luxuriousness” of a dish? Chef Thomas Keller says in one of his cookbooks that when he serves truffle he shaves large portions because it is the only way it gives the proper kind of “impact”—to have the diner really appreciate the luxuriousness of truffles, let’s say. It is not entirely clear whether this would be *merely* to play on a diner’s wishes for rarity and expense.

Controversy also infects cases where disputants do not see a disagreement as involving pluralistic gustatory goods. It may be obvious that wine and beer can both be good; but what about that debate I mentioned comparing traditional cooking with “cutting-edge” techniques? I suggested there was pluralism there, but my suggestion was not obviously true. We could easily imagine a hardcore traditionalist stubbornly maintaining that the supposed good in forward-looking alternative cooking techniques is not really lost on him because there is nothing there for him to miss. And we can easily imagine it being difficult to convince him otherwise. Finally, we can easily imagine it being difficult to convince him otherwise in ways that make it clear to us that he is *just* not seeing the reasons aright. As it is sometimes put, he seems perfectly “rational” or “reasonable” or free from “cognitive shortcoming” in engaging in this seemingly intractable debate.

### 3.4 Pointing to Intractable Taste Disputes

By now, we are in territory familiar to those who have encountered philosophical discussion about whether there is something distinctive about certain areas of disagreement that bring us to doubt the objectivity of those areas. The controversial disagreements we considered are exactly the kind of disagreements that subjectivist-leaning theorists would want to characterize as somehow “faultless.” Let us represent a wide variety of such controversial taste disagreements with one boring example:

Sayaka: “This natto [fermented soy bean] is delicious.”

Zack: “What? Have you smelled it? It’s disgusting!”

Sayaka: “I didn’t say it smelled great. But so what? Stinky cheese doesn’t smell so great either, but it tastes good.”

Zack: “What? Stinky cheese is disgusting!”

Once again, let us try to characterize this disagreement without first thinking of it as needing to be “faultless.” In our example, Sayaka judges something to be delicious and is met with a counter-judgment. Zack seems to suggest that the item’s smelling disgusting is a reason for thinking that the item is disgusting.<sup>16</sup> Sayaka responds by suggesting that the item’s not smelling wonderful does not count as its being disgusting. To illustrate why, she cites a paradigm or comparable case of something which she thinks is delicious but does not smell wonderful. Zack balks at the proposed example because he thinks it to exactly be a case of something that is disgusting—perhaps even a paradigm case of it.

One way to understand what is going on here is in terms of Sayaka’s employing or accepting a particular standard by which something counts as delicious. Whatever the exact form of her standard, it seems to entail (or call for thinking) that smelling not-so-wonderful is not sufficient for something to be disgusting.<sup>17</sup> Zack makes it clear that he does not accept such a standard exactly because he suggests, as a reason to think the item is disgusting, the item’s off-smell. So it looks like the two employ standards that are in conflict. Since they seem to be adjudicating which standard is valid, they can also be thought of as employing or accepting further standards—these for what counts as a good way of counting something delicious or disgusting. Her further standard involves counting stinky cheese as a paradigm example of something’s being delicious; while his does not. In other words, the two argue not only over what counts as the item’s being delicious or disgusting, but also what counts as a valid way of so counting.

But it is not just this complexity in the disagreement that makes it seem particularly “difficult to resolve.” It is rather the fact that we do not really know how best to continue the disagreement about the “further” standard. Zack thinks stinky cheese is disgusting. Presumably, he finds it disgusting exactly because of its not-so-wonderful smell. But Sayaka meant for the stinky cheese to a paradigm example showing that certain not-so-wonderful smells did not count against an item’s deliciousness. So it is hard to see how Sayaka and Zack could continue the debate without simply “begging the question” against each other, each using conflicting “paradigm” examples.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps we can imagine Sayaka to take a different tactic and question Zack on what it means for a smell to be “wonderful” or not:

<sup>16</sup>If this needs to be clearer, we can add Sayaka’s explicitly asking him why he finds natto disgusting.

<sup>17</sup>Again, I am bracketing the details of a number of difficult questions about how best to understand the form of a “standard.” Is it to be understood as a kind of imperative? Or a universal statement? Is it hedged; if so, how much so? I am also bracketing the questions of how wide a scope standards have, and what it means for a person to utilize or accept a standard (and whether it is different to use or be “guided by” a standard and to merely accept or “conform to” it).

<sup>18</sup>I am roughly thinking of “begging the question” as an instance of one party utilizing the very disputed standard in question as a reason (i.e., thinking of it as a reason) in favor of the standard. I am *not* using it to mean that using a disputed standard to back up the standard must be *epistemically faulty*, though that might be a more ordinary use of the phrase.

Sayaka: Okay, if you insist that the food has to smell wonderfully in order for it to be delicious, fine. But what do you mean by “wonderful?” I mean, in some sense I find the fermented nuttiness of stinky cheese and natto to be wonderful smelling. Sure, one might not love it on first smell; but that just means it’s an acquired taste.

Zack: Wonderful smells emanate from things like mint, lavender, roasted meat, and so on; not rotting fermented things.

But this sort of exchange reveals that Sayaka and Zack would just once again pick conflicting paradigm examples for what to count as wonderful-smelling. And once again, it looks like they won’t be able to continue the debate without simply begging the question against each other.

Perhaps the debate could continue at the level of what the two count as relevant differences:

Zack: Surely you admit that, say, the rotting shark that is an Icelandic delicacy smells bad. What’s the difference between that kind of thing and stinky cheese?

Sayaka: Yes, I admit that, but stinky cheese is exactly not like rotting flesh. Sure, it can also smell sometimes of ammonia, but it doesn’t smell of death and decay; it’s not putrid, it’s just pungent or piquant or pleasantly sour.

Zack: But the bacteria on some of that cheese is the same stuff that eats human skin cells and creates human body odor. Do you find that pleasant?!

Sayaka: Well, I didn’t say that it was all lilies, but when I think about it, I guess I don’t think body odor *always* smells horribly.

Again, the continuation looks like it ends in a similar impasse.

### 3.5 The Charge of Chauvinism, Avenues of Resistance

We can now better understand the way the skeptic about distinctively gustatory reasons will issue his charge of chauvinism against the objectivist. Given the prevalence of the kinds of intractable disagreements we have seen above, he suggests, it seems that the only way for an ordinary taster to freely issue forth in taste judgments is for the ordinary taster to take a hefty kind of (seeming) epistemic risk: to judge despite the potential for one’s judgments to become contested by seemingly reasonable disputants who one would not be able to convince otherwise even by citing (what one thinks is) one’s best reasons. This seems to be a risk because ordinarily if we face reasonable disputants who we cannot convince even citing our best reasons, we feel some pressure to lower our confidence in what we believe, perhaps even to the point of withholding belief.<sup>19</sup> The skeptic then raises this challenge: what could get

<sup>19</sup>Actually, it is hotly contested in the contemporary literature on “peer disagreement” whether we really should lower our confidence in the face of such people (see, e.g., Elga, 2007; Kelly, 2009). Or at least, this is what is being hotly contested, if we assume that what epistemologists now call “epistemic peers”

an ordinary taster to engage in such seeming epistemic risk other than the belief that it is *not* a great risk, and what could drive this misguided belief other than some form of hubris? The form of hubris is what I have been calling “chauvinism”—thinking or judging or acting as if one’s standards are more epistemically faultless than is warranted by the existence of hefty epistemic risk.<sup>20</sup>

The skeptic about distinctively gustatory reasons has an answer to this question: gustatory reasons are not what I have been calling “distinctively gustatory reasons”—paradigmatic cases of gustatory reasons which do not essentially depend on subjective factors such as one’s tastes, interests or purposes.<sup>21</sup> If this is right, then it is not hubris that causes the judger to freely issue forth in taste judgments despite the hefty “epistemic risk.” It is rather that there is in fact no real epistemic risk, despite the potential for intractable disagreements.<sup>22</sup> For the objectivist who thinks that the “standards” accepted by each side in our intractable disagreements just pick out features that count something as delicious, tout court—the epistemic risk that seems to result cannot be discounted as easily. This is why the skeptic thinks he has a “better explanation.”

In order to canvass strategies for response, let us put the skeptic’s challenge in the following way:

- (1) There is comparatively large potential for intractable taste disagreement (where intractability is just characterized by paradigmatic examples and not in a way that obviously begs the question against objectivism).
- (2) If there were nothing “epistemically unique” about gustatory reasons, disputants would be more cautious about coming out with their own opinions when faced with such potential, unless they are just chauvinists.

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are just those with reasonable alternative views. Sometimes “peers” are thought of more in terms of their *general* epistemic virtues: in general, they get things wrong as often as we do, we trust their epistemic capabilities, and so on. Still, there is a connection between the debate about what to do in the face of peer disagreement and the question of what the implications are of being unable to discount reasonable views without seeming to presuppose the very standards in question. This can be seen, for instance, in the way many philosophers in the peer disagreement literature talk about how we cannot disregard the conflicting views of peers on an “independent” basis (see, e.g., Christensen, 2009; Elga, 2007; Enoch, forthcoming; Lackey, 2008). Furthermore, one reason to characterize epistemic peers by their *general* epistemic virtues is exactly to avoid characterizing their epistemic prowess by using the very view “in question” to discount it, for this would be to fail to discount the peer on an “independent” basis.

<sup>20</sup>I speak in terms of risk because I do not think the worry rests necessarily on one *actually* engaging in intractable verbal or written disputes with other people; but only that this could very probably happen, given the way we are.

<sup>21</sup>I have moved from talk of standards to talk of reasons. Not all reasons one has for a judgment that something is so are features (that one believes are features) that count something as so, which is what standards pick out. So, for example, seeing smoke is a reason to believe there is fire, but the smoke coming from the fire does not partially constitute the fire’s being there. But still, features that count or constitute something as so are, when taken up by a judger, *paradigmatic* reasons a judger has.

<sup>22</sup>As we have already seen in Chapter 1, it is still a burden on the skeptic to explain how the “disagreements” here are *genuine* disagreements, but this worry can be set aside here.

- (3) Disputants in such disagreements stick to their own opinions—(that is, they feel at Ease making judgments just on the basis of their own tastes and experiences). And disputants, faced with the potential for such disagreements, are not very cautious—quite the contrary. (They also feel Allowance towards other disputants’ assertions, even when they disagree—they allow that, just like themselves, those asserters are within their right to feel Ease making judgments.)
- (4) Objectivism is committed to there being nothing “epistemically unique” about gustatory reasons, so it has to say that (3) is true because disputants are chauvinistic.
- (5) This is uncharitable.
- (6) So there is some reason to think there *is* something epistemically unique about gustatory reasons (just as subjectivism claims).

How could the objectivist respond? There are a number of strategies. He could deny (1) by denying that there really is or has been enough intractable disagreement to warrant thinking that we run into a large potential of being engaged in such disagreements. He could also deny (3) by denying that people really do stick by their own opinions and really are not very cautious. These would be two ways of denying or watering down the phenomenon the skeptic thinks we need to explain. I will return to this kind of strategy later in this chapter because I think there is something to it, but I prefer to take on strategies that allow the phenomenon and explain it consistently with objectivism.

Attempting to do the latter, the objectivist can instead deny (2), and that (4) really follows. The objectivist could insist that the argument really only goes through if we replace (2) with (2\*), and (4) with (4\*):

- (2\*) If there were nothing epistemically unique about gustatory reasons, disputants would be more cautious about their own opinions when faced with such potential, unless they are just chauvinists or something else charitably explains why they do not retract and are not more cautious.
- (4\*) Objectivism is committed to there being nothing “epistemically unique” about gustatory reasons and it cannot charitably explain why disputers do not retract and are not more cautious, so it has to say that (3) is true because disputants are chauvinists.

But if the objectivist could in fact give the relevant explanation without attributing chauvinism, he can deny the truth of (4\*). So, for instance, he may explain disputants’ lack of retraction and caution as something that occurs at the level of the dialectical point of taste disagreements, rather than at the level of any epistemic risk that comes with the potential for taste disagreements. What is going on, the objectivist may suggest, is not that disputants are chauvinistic in the face of epistemic risk, but rather that disputants see the relevant dialectical risks and are unwilling to fully engage in the game of giving and taking reasons in disagreements aimed at effective resolution. That is, disputants do not care to be rational disagreeers, especially given widespread disparity in tastes (much like you might choose not

play to win in a basketball game with players who are more than a foot taller or shorter than you). Furthermore, the objectivist would insist, this is not an uncharitable understanding of disputants.

Another, somewhat more stubborn method of resisting the refined argument is to accept (2\*) while giving an explanation that *accepts* that there is something “epistemically unique” about gustatory reasons, but to understand ‘epistemic uniqueness’ in a way that is actually consistent with objectivism. That is, the objectivist can accept (6), but not because of (4\*). He would then need to explain how he can avoid skepticism about distinctively gustatory reasons while still finding something “epistemically unique” about gustatory reasons that explains (1) and (3). Here is one way of engaging in this strategy: by claiming that taste disputants are comparatively more often “reasonable,” “rational,” “warranted,” “blameless,” or even “faultless,” in the objectivist-*friendly* sense of “reasonable but incorrect.” Given that it was clear enough from the get-go that objectivists could allow that tasters are “reasonable” or “blameless,” I think such a strategy would invite the subjectivist insistence that this sense of “reasonable,” etc., is somehow not strong enough to explain a genuine phenomenon here.<sup>23</sup>

Now, one thing an objectivist could do in response to this insistence is to insist back: “Okay, but what is your motivation for insisting on something stronger?” But even if the subjectivist needs to give us a motivation, still the objectivist here has yet to accomplish two important tasks. First, he does not tell us why taste disputants are *comparatively* more often “reasonable but incorrect.” Why more so in this area of discourse than others? If the objectivist has no answer to this, then his is not really a strategy that accepts (6)—that there is something epistemically *unique* about gustatory reasons. Second, the strategy does not really address the challenge that the skeptic is issuing here. Remember the worry is to make sense of the facts cited in (1) and (3) without being uncharitable. How can thinking of people as (more) often “reasonable but incorrect” help us understand the facts in (1) and (3)? I think the answer to this question is: it does not, *by itself*. The objectivist needs to appeal to more than just the fact that he can allow that taste disputants are often reasonable even if incorrect. I will thus myself avoid this strategy. Instead, I will try the strategy mentioned before it: to explain Ease and Allowance not in terms of a chauvinistic reaction to an epistemic risk, but in terms of a reasonable reaction to a dialectical risk.

I have already implicitly covered the desiderata for a good objectivist explanation here. Let me summarize. First, we must make sense of Ease and Allowance; and, as we had to in the case of gustatory testimony in Chapter 2, we must make sense of it as a *contrast* with other areas of discourse. Second, we want to explain Ease and Allowance without merely relying on an objectivist-friendly notion of ‘reasonableness’—we are seeking a “deeper” explanation, one might say, something that *acknowledges* our subjectivist’s sense, however ultimately misguided, that the objectivist is not giving us enough. Third, our explanation needs to be compatible with the existence of distinctively gustatory reasons. Let us see how we do.

<sup>23</sup>My sense is that, given certain commitments, the subjectivist wants a notion of ‘reasonable’ somehow closer to ‘reasonable because correct (at his context)’—closer, that is, to ‘truth relative to the taster’s/assessor’s context.’ I will say more about this in the next chapter.



## 3.6 Dialectical Nonchalance

Let us start by noticing a series of logical points about our paradigm case of intractable disagreement above, where Zack and Sayaka seem unable to non-question-beggingly convince each other of something. That you cannot convince another does not entail that there is nothing objectively correct about what it is you are trying to convince the other of (after all, maybe your powers of persuasion are lacking). That you cannot convince another by citing what you think are your best reasons, or even by citing the correct reasons, also does not entail this (after all, maybe the opponent is too dull to see the reasons). The same lack of entailment seems to hold for all of the following possibilities: that you cannot maintain your view about something except by maintaining a standard for counting that something as so; or except by maintaining your standard in the face of “reasonable” (but invalid) alternative standards; or except by using the very standard you accept to discount alternative standards. “Circularly” defending yourself does not by itself entail that there is something fishy about the objectivity of what is at stake. Not only that, but such “circularity” does not even entail that there is something *epistemically* problematic about maintaining the view in question.

There is thus no obvious entailment from what we might call “dialectical ineffectiveness” (in particular, from the dialectical ineffectiveness that comes with circularly arguing) to the negation of objectivism. But of course, the skeptic’s worry is not (should not be) that there is such an entailment. Rather, the idea is that the objectivist does not have a decent *explanation* of matters here. That is, the skeptic claims to have a better explanation of our confident dialectical behavior in the face of “intractable” disagreements, and instances of “circularly” using one’s own standards to discount others’ being especially widespread or easy to fall into in this area.<sup>24</sup> So I do not think pointing out a bare, logical distinction between epistemic faultiness and “dialectical ineffectiveness” is going to get the objectivist very far. Nevertheless, the distinction provides a jumping-off point for the objectivist. In order to have an effective explanation of Ease and Allowance, what the objectivist needs in addition to the distinction above is a number of facts about gustatory matters, our attitudes about them, our gustatory tastes, and how we react to dialectical situations we cannot realistically avoid.

Let us assume that it is correct to describe cases of “intractable” taste disagreement as involving the inability to resolve the dispute via an appeal to standards that the other party can agree with. Let us also assume that, in one clear sense of “circular,” this means that taste disputants often cannot resolve their disagreements by providing non-circular arguments on behalf of their opinions. But if we cannot resolve intractable taste disagreements by non-circular appeal to standards that the other party can agree with, then we cannot achieve a major goal of engaging in “rational disagreement”: exactly the goal of resolving a dispute by

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<sup>24</sup>Notice that making the above points required pointing out situations in which, for instance, the other party is “too dull to see the correct reasons.” But if objectivism forces us to understand ourselves as *constantly* thinking things like, “The other party is too dull to see the correct reasons,” it makes us look remarkably chauvinistic.

coming to an agreed-upon position by convincing each other using non-circular arguments.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, such a goal seems to be “constitutive” of disagreement, in the following sense. If you do not attempt to meet such a goal when engaging in rational disagreement, then you are not engaging in the activity of rational disagreement *well*, just like if you do not attempt to win a tennis match, then you are not engaging in the playing tennis *well*. A “constitutive goal” of an activity is similar to a “constitutive norm” of the activity. Just as not playing by the rules (i.e., the constitutive norms) of tennis is not playing tennis correctly, not attempting to win a tennis match is not playing tennis well (though it may still be playing tennis correctly).<sup>26</sup>

To see why, in the case of taste in particular and especially, we often come to a point where we will inevitably violate a constitutive goal of disagreement, let us try to compare another violation of a constitutive goal of disagreement. The parallels will be instructive. Consider my asserting, “I am resting my back by laying in bed.” Suppose someone started a dispute with me by challenging in the following way: “But how do you know you have a body?” Let us suppose, as seems plausible, that we feel both that it might be “appropriate” for me not to answer such a challenge, and that there is something “off” about the challenger’s so challenging. Some philosophers think that what explains these feelings is the fact that the proposition, ‘I have a body,’ enjoys a privileged epistemic status.<sup>27</sup> Let us ignore that possibility and consider instead the possibility that the explanation of the “offness” has nothing much to do with the privileged epistemic status of such a proposition, even if it enjoys one, but rather with the privileged dialectical status of it. The following is one version of such an explanation, given by Rescorla (2009). We typically have no trouble asserting (or assuming) “I have a body” because it seems to be a typical background assumption that is shared among human interlocutors. If someone challenges the assertion, however, we are suddenly faced with the possibility that the challenger very atypically does not accept all sorts of background assumptions that we rely on in order to assert a whole swath of things. If he doubts ‘I have a body,’ what else does he not really share with us? Because of our dialectical goal of resolving disagreements non-circularly, when faced with this challenger, it is reasonable for us not to incur further commitments by asserting anything in defense of ‘I have a body’—how would we go about defending such further assertions, given what our interlocutor seems willing to put into question? Furthermore, we expect our interlocutor

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<sup>25</sup>I am here speaking of “disagreement” not as merely a state people (or their beliefs) may be in relation to each other, but specifically as a dialectical encounter between such persons via the use of verbal or written communication. When I speak of “potential” disagreement, I mean the potential to become engaged in this dialectical process, and not just the (much more trivial) potential to be in a state of disagreement. I will return to the question of whether I am being fair to the skeptic/subjectivist by focusing on dialectical encounters.

<sup>26</sup>I am taking this explication of the distinction from (Rescorla, 2007, 2009). Raz makes a similar distinction between the rules and the “values” of a game. (Raz, 1975/1999) Notice that neither constitutive norm nor constitutive goal are constitutive of merely *engaging* in the activity. What is constitutive of just engaging in an activity probably varies from activity to activity, but perhaps it almost always includes appearing as if one is trying to engage in the activity in accord with (enough of) its norms and goals.

<sup>27</sup>For this kind of view, see (Wright, 2004).

now to give us some sense of what exactly he is questioning and why—a sense of what he *would* allow as shared background information. If he does not explain himself, then we feel that he is not promoting the achievement of the dialectical goal, and that he is blameworthy for this. So we feel both that it is reasonable for us not to defend, and that it is unreasonable for our challenger to issue the challenge without further explanation.<sup>28</sup>

The above explanation relied on the fact that we react in certain predictable ways in response to the predictable undermining of a fundamental dialectical goal. The fact that ‘I have a body’ is a widely shared background assumption among interlocutors means that the dialectical goal of the dispute has the potential to become undermined if the assumption is challenged; in response to that, interlocutors will detect certain kinds of oddness and expect certain kinds of continuations. Similarly, facts about our background assumptions can likewise risk undermining a dialectical goal and generate certain kinds of oddnesses when we engage in taste disputes. When it comes to matters of taste, however, what we need to consider is not the fact that there are certain widely shared background assumptions, but the opposite: that there are hardly any shared background assumptions. In particular, in a world where we have access to a wide variety of food and drink, but in which it is not morally, socially or politically very important to become such fine and dedicated connoisseurs of food and drink that many of us actually *share* a very wide range of eating and drinking experiences, we are faced with other food consumers who have accessed very different sorts of food and drink than we have. Furthermore, even if we share many experiences, we may not share our gustatory sensibilities with regard to them, for those sensibilities are very sensitive to the remaining small differences in our experiences. It does not take much to have a radically different attitude towards basic table wine if you have experienced really fine wine; or towards chicken and steak if you have experienced offal or preserved meat.<sup>29</sup> Taste disputes are thus fraught with the possibility of its dialectical goals being undermined by our lack of shared experiences and sensibilities, and our not knowing where and how much we do not share. You cannot effectively defend your views with rational, non-circular arguments if so many of your premises and standards are not shared.

However, are there not serious disanalogies with the case of “I have a body?” In that case, because we think we do share background assumptions about having bodies, we usually have no trouble asserting such things or things that presuppose them. What about matters of taste, where we exactly do not share such “background assumptions?” In that case, it may seem as if we should never assert matters of taste, since we know ahead of time that we cannot defend them well. But we do assert such things—in fact we do it with Ease, and we Allow others to do it with ease! So am I wrong to think this point about our lack of shared background explains Ease and Allowance? I do not think so. It is true that, were it *completely* pointless to ever engage in taste disputes, then Ease and Allowance would

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<sup>28</sup>Rescorla (2009) uses this kind of explanation to defend the idea that, although it is reasonable for us not to defend, it is nevertheless not *correct*, for it still violates one of the constitutive *norms* of assertion: to defend what we assert *whenever* it is challenged. This further claim is orthogonal to our discussion.

<sup>29</sup>Also, unlike testimony in other areas, gustatory testimony does not grease the wheels of information-sharing because we Resist gustatory testimony. (See Chapter 2.)

make no sense, and so it cannot be that Ease and Allowance is explained by the complete pointlessness of taste disputes. However, we also do not need to accept that taste disputes are completely pointless, despite what I have said above. For my point above was only that taste disputes are fraught with the possibility that their constitutive goal of disagreeing is not likely to be achieved. This does not mean we never take the risk, or it is completely pointless to, or that there would be something *wrong* with our assertions were we to put them forth in full knowledge that we probably will not fulfill our dialectical goals. To see this, we have to consider more carefully the idea of a ‘constitutive goal of disagreement.’

What happens if parties in a disagreement cannot achieve a constitutive goal of disagreement? In general: whatever happens when participants in an activity realize they cannot engage in the activity *well*. This might mean giving up the activity, but it might not. It might mean taking back “moves” within the activity that impose obligations on you that you now cannot discharge well, or it might not—you might just go ahead and incur any penalties for not discharging them well. So, for example, if you realize you are about to have a “cat’s game” in tic-tac-toe, so that you cannot win the game, you might quit playing. Or, you might just play it out to the tie, since doing so is quick and a good chunk of the (very mild) pleasure for an adult of playing tic-tac-toe is in the scribbling and not so much in the winning of the too-easy game. But perhaps you play it out with nowhere near as much engagement, caring, and so on. This would be the expression of the fact the constitutive goal of game-playing has been undermined. Myriad things can happen given an awareness of the unavailability of success at reaching one of disagreement’s constitutive goals. It depends on other facts and what else is at stake. This is even clearer with more complex activities—playing tennis, for example. If you realize you cannot win a tennis match, that is not often a reason to give up; not always a reason to not play in the first place; sometimes a reason to try less hard; sometimes a reason to try just as hard; and sometimes a reason to try only specific things within the game. There is a complex whirl of interests and purposes surrounding the goals internal to the game.

In the case of taste, we are faced with the possibility of a constitutive dialectical goal being undermined. Realistically, that possibility will be more or less probable depending on the circumstances—depending on whether we are in a room full of foodies just like us, or in a room (field) full of people who grew up on bushmeat covered in its own vomit and feces. But even if we suppose that, barring special knowledge, it is a constant and real danger, this would not mean that asserting taste claims is completely pointless. Furthermore, because what we are dealing with here is a constitutive *goal* of disputes, our continuing to assert and deny others assertions’ does not necessarily violate the *norms* of assertion. We may still be perfectly within our rights as asserters asserting what we do, as long as we abide by the aims or commitments that are the norms of assertion. We can still aim at the truth, or commit to defend our assertions. What we cannot do, perhaps, is to do these sorts of things *well*—say, with non-circular arguments that bring us to shared premises—but we might not *care* either. Not only do we not always have to play tennis only when we can play it well, we can certainly play badly without thereby violating the rules.

When it comes to matters of taste, I am suggesting, we do not care about “playing”

only when we can play well. Why should we? What bad moral, social or even intellectual things will happen to us if we express what we like and what our gustatory sensibilities are by asserting taste claims, and then we do not defend them very well because of how much interlocutors do not share with us? Almost nothing, in the case of moral and social consequences; and nothing obviously much, in the case of intellectual consequences. For instance, nothing *so far* suggests that we are not *justified* in believing what we do, despite our dialectical difficulties.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, there are other, ulterior reasons to have light-hearted, rationally-imperfect “disputes” with others about taste—for instance, we may use the disputes to figure out, eventually, what (little) we do share. Also, we might just really like expressing what we think is good. Finally, disputing with others despite a lack of shared sensibilities is a great way of mildly coercing others with our sensibilities—for instance, by using the dispute as an excuse to adamantly get them to share our experiences.<sup>31</sup>

How can we be sure that we are not “violating any rules” by engaging in taste disputes despite it being a constant and real danger that the constitutive goal of disagreement is undermined by the lack of shared experiences and sensibilities? Let us take one view of the nature of the norms of assertion and see how it interacts with the idea that disputes have a constitutive goal. Suppose it is a norm of assertion to be committed to defending the assertion when it is legitimately challenged. But suppose we cannot defend the assertion well because we cannot give non-circular arguments in defense of our assertions. Still, we can defend it. We can, for instance, give circular arguments, as some of our examples above involving Zack and Sayaka show. We have not necessarily violated any norms in doing so. It is perhaps the best we can do, just as it may be the best one can do, faced with a much superior tennis player (and still wanting to play), to win a few points or games while soundly losing the match. Of course, we could build up a stronger norm of assertion: properly defending an assertion, someone might insist, means giving non-circular arguments that *persuade*. But it seems plainly false that we are violating the rules of assertion unless we do something as sophisticated, as difficult, and as beyond-our-control as giving non-circular arguments that actually persuade. It is much more plausible that this is just a *good* way of defending our assertions.<sup>32</sup>

Suppose we continue to engage in taste disputes, and we still make the commitments that come with asserting. Still, in light of the undermined dialectical goal, our engagement is less profound and less careful. When we do defend, we care less about making sure our reasons will convince, are completely non-circular, and so on, than if we knew that the constitutive goal of disagreement may be achieved. In fact, if the danger of undermining

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<sup>30</sup>This may be a place to remind ourselves of the series of “logical” points that began this section.

<sup>31</sup>Ironically, these sorts of “ulterior” goals of taste disputes are exactly what some taste subjectivists want to emphasize about taste disputes. As we saw in Chapter 1 for example, Egan (2009) discusses the variety of “connection-building” activities we engage in by disputing about taste. I think the fact that these sorts of activities are so emphasized when subjectivists think about matters of taste can be partially explained by the fact that we care less about being rationally perfect disputers in this area, at least as well as it might be explained by subjectivism’s being true.

<sup>32</sup>Imagine building down-the-line winners and aces into the rules of tennis!

the constitutive goal of assertion is strong and common enough, we can make this a default strategy—to not engage in rational taste disputes in a very profound or careful way. The complex interaction between the lack of certainty in effectively reaching our dialectical goals with the desire to continue to assert for other reasons is, I am suggesting, exactly what results in Ease and Allowance. We feel a certain nonchalance about asserting claims about matters of taste because we know there is not much at stake. We are not looking to play the “disputing game” at our best because there is less of a point to doing so than normally, nor does not doing so faze us—these matters are just not very important. We also feel that others are within their rights to play the disputing game in the same way, so this gives us a sense in which we “allow” them their assertions.<sup>33</sup> Notice, importantly, that this has nothing to do with their being “reasonable” or not—even if they are *not* very reasonable, we can “allow” them their assertions.<sup>34</sup> This is unlike how we feel towards those challengers who challenge us on our assumption that we have bodies. Furthermore, we now have a contrast with other areas of discourse: unlike in other areas, when it comes to gustatory matters nobody is even trying to be rationally perfect, given how difficult it is to achieve a central dialectical goal.<sup>35</sup>

Before I move on, let us “test” the above explanation a little. If the explanation above is sensible, then we should be able to consider what would be true if our gustatory experiences and sensibilities *were* homogenized, or if matters of taste *were* rather important, and see that Ease and Allowance would either disappear or not appear in the way they do. If our experiences and sensibilities were homogenized, we would no longer have a standing strategy of not taking taste disputes very seriously, in terms of fulfilling their dialectical goal. We can see this by asking ourselves what happens when we have special knowledge in certain cases. Suppose you know your potential disputers are people with very similar sensibilities. In that case, I think we detect less of a sense that you can be so free with your assertions, and so nonchalant about any countering ones of theirs. There is more of a chance that aiming to rationally engage in a dispute and aiming to do it well will result in success. So you will be a bit more careful about *just* coming out with assertions. You will want to make sure that you

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<sup>33</sup>Of course, none of this is to say that when we ourselves have reasons to suspect that our judgments are epistemically suspect when compared to others’ judgments, we would not be very careful about our assertions. But also of course, such cases are not ones that exemplify intractable taste disputes.

<sup>34</sup>There are limits to this, of course. But if the asserter is being wildly unreasonable, there is no sense that we are dealing with the supposedly worrisome possibility of intractable disagreement, for the dispute is tractable: just dismiss the wildly unreasonable interlocutor.

<sup>35</sup>This is not to say we can never find this pattern of engagement and nonchalance in other areas. Imagine you are at a conference that consists of roughly 70 religious climate change deniers and 30 climate change scientists, but you are not at first aware of this. You enter the conference playing the disputing game normally, asserting things about how climate change is happening, and you suddenly find yourself in many seemingly question-begging arguments with some stubborn-headed people. You finally realize the make-up of the conference. I think you will start to play the disputing game differently; you may very well become more “nonchalant” about your assertions. It helps to remember that the 30 percent of people who are like you gives you some motivation to keep having conversations with others—it helps you quickly figure out who to hang out with, for instance. And if it helps to reduce “noise,” let us stipulate that (contrary to fact) climate change is not a very emotional, high-stakes issue.

can defend them. After all, if you cannot, that might very well say something about your own understanding of your own experiences and sensibilities, since people with very similar ones are seeing things in a different light. Furthermore, you will not just let other people be so carefree about their assertions.<sup>36</sup>

Now suppose you know your potential disputants are people with better or more reliable sensibilities and a wider, richer range of experiences. Presumably, this is also to imagine the disputes to not really be “intractable.”<sup>37</sup> In this case, Ease and Allowance seem to be less forceful—we should be more careful about what we say in front of our superiors, and we hold superiors more to their word. The explanation above makes sense of this because it can allow that in cases where you know your potential disputants are superior, you can more successfully achieve dialectical goals (since you will have a tendency to adopt their assumptions as yours), and your default strategy to not play the dialectical game well may be overridden.<sup>38</sup> Note also that though you do not share the same range of experiences with your potential disputants, still their experiences may encompass yours and so you may still share a range of experiences. If we are confronted with people whose sensibilities we are unsure of, but who we know live in, say, a similar culture (and so share more of a range of experiences with us than someone in a different culture), we may take *some* more care with playing the dialectical game.<sup>39</sup>

Now hold fixed the heterogeneity of our gustatory experiences and sensibilities, but consider what would be true if gustatory matters were very important. If gustatory matters were everywhere important, for all sorts of reasons, I think we would not take so lightly our taste assertions or others’ taste assertions, and we would not take so lightly arguments involving such assertions.<sup>40</sup> In such a case, trying very hard to convince may become very important for ulterior reasons, important enough to discount the difficulty of achieving disagreement’s constitutive goal. As an example, consider television food judges critiquing competitors’ dishes. Such food judges, we should remember, are not necessarily such that they share very similar experiences and sensibilities.<sup>41</sup> Yet they do not *especially* freely come out with assertions. And when they do assert, they do not blithely maintain their assertions in the face

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<sup>36</sup>Compare: if you are playing hard to win in a tennis match, you do not want your partner to be lobbing you balls.

<sup>37</sup>Were it not for our Resistance to gustatory testimony, we would often defer to disputants in these cases.

<sup>38</sup>Again, Resistance will play a role here by cutting against your tendency to adopt their assumptions as yours. Insofar as it does, we may find ourselves adopting our default strategy. And insofar as it does, we will also find ourselves once again at ease issuing forth judgments in front of our superiors. In that case, Ease is partially explained by Resistance.

<sup>39</sup>This is not to deny that when faced with alien cultures, we do not have other, non-dialectical reasons, to be dialectically careful—perhaps it will come off as really rude if you do not try really hard to rationally convince and to be convinced.

<sup>40</sup>An interesting analogy here may be to debates between theists and atheists. The debate is very important but there is very little common ground. I think it is telling these debates can be very heated despite the often obvious inability to resolve them. Thanks to John MacFarlane for this example.

<sup>41</sup>However, the example may suggest that what counts as sharing “enough” or “similar” enough such experiences and sensibilities (to not have to worry about dialectical goals being undermined) depends on context.

of disagreement. When others' stick their necks out and assert, they seem ready to criticize and nitpick. Not only do they say that others are wrong; they will try to give good reasons and ask for good reasons. They do not seem to be defending their assertions poorly and not caring about how well others defend their assertions. They do not seem to be thinking 'Oh, what does it matter?' For there is much at stake. They are awarding or denying large prizes, and they have to save face in front of their prestigious colleagues and look reasonable to a wide television audience.

### 3.7 Objection: It's Not About Arguing!

By now, there may be a natural worry about my explanation. "Wait a minute," the subjectivist objects, "You are making out my challenge to be too much one about *argument*. My point is not about argument. It is about the epistemic bases for our taste judgments. As an objectivist, you have to predict that we should be very cautious about how we base our judgments, epistemically speaking, but we are not very cautious—we just base our judgments on what we like and dislike, on our personal taste experiences. The only way you can explain our lack of epistemic caution is chauvinism. That is the real point."

In response to this worry, I need to reiterate how I understand the dialectic so far. If there is a *bare* intuition of the form, "we must epistemically base our taste judgments on our mere likes and dislikes," then I can say nothing except that citing this intuition ignores the central question of my chapters: whether or not we have any motivation—resting on examination of our gustatory practices—to think that distinctively gustatory reasons do not exist. After all, this "intuition" just says that our reasons must be essentially sourced in our likes and dislikes. As I already mentioned in Chapter 2 when discussing the "Freeness worry," and as I will elaborate on in Chapter 4, I do not think there is a legitimate worry stemming just from the idea that our personal experiences are "sufficient" for our taste judgments. The bare worry seems to quickly beg the question against objectivism. It may very well be that there are separate, completely independently motivated epistemological worries about objectivism, and so in favor of subjectivism. Perhaps that is the motivation for someone's intuition here that we just do always base our taste judgments on gustatory reasons that are not distinctive. If so, I have no response. But if the subjectivist wants to look for something within our practices that might motivate such an intuition, then I can say that this is exactly what I have tried to do on his behalf. The way we face or engage in certain tough taste arguments is a clear aspect of our gustatory practice. I was thinking that maybe there is something "fishy" about the way we do such things, and that it is maybe this fishiness that is behind the subjectivist's intuition. On the assumption that this is so, I have then tried to defend objectivism by marking that fishiness out in the practice and explaining it consistently with objectivism. So I think focusing here on "arguing" is legitimate, at least on *that* assumption.

Perhaps there is some other aspect of our practice that is behind the subjectivist's above objection. Maybe when we consider just lone cases of assertion, there is a subjectivist worry



generated that I have not addressed by focusing on argument between disputants. But I do not know what that worry could be. First of all, to repeat, we do not *just* assert something is disgusting when we do not like it (we might know we have not educated our palates), or even that something is delicious when we do like it (we might know that we are succumbing to a horrible craving). I do not see the block to thinking that we assert something is delicious or disgusting when we think we have good reasons to do so, and that we use our tastes and gustatory reactions as a defeasible way of seeing the reasons. To insist otherwise without saying anything else about disputes or potential disputes seems very close to just insisting on the above subjectivist intuition about epistemic “bases.” Where is the phenomenon here? Suppose the subjectivist sticks to merely saying that we “often” assert something is delicious or disgusting after we have feelings of gustatory pleasure or displeasure as a result of eating it; why would this by itself appear to be chauvinistic or epistemically problematic? I have tried to say why it might appear to be *if* we appeal to other facts: about potential disputants who we cannot convince in certain ways, about other tastes clashing with ours that we cannot discount in certain ways. But those other facts I have tried to make sense of consistently with objectivism.

Is the supposed phenomenon here that we often very *quickly* assert something? I eat a rat, all alone, and I spit it out, very quickly crying, “Oh God, that is disgusting!” I do not look at the level of the ocean, jump back, and very quickly cry out, “Oh God, climate change is happening!” Does this mean the objectivist has even *prima facie* reason to concede that I asserted the taste claim beyond my epistemic means? I do not think so. If we think of assertions as normatively tied to commitments to defend in the dialectical game of giving and taking reasons, then the story I told in the previous section can be told here.<sup>42</sup> Like I said, we treat the asserting of taste claims as we treat the playing of games we know we probably cannot win but still want to play—by not being very careful about them, rationally speaking. Saying that we find something delicious or disgusting is a common way to express how much we do or do not like something; so we go ahead and do it, even though it commits us to defend our assertions via rational means that we cannot fully engage in. There is not likewise this nonchalance with climate change claims. Those are not claims the defending of which we feel we cannot fully engage in (barring special situations). They are also not claims that are especially useful for expressing how much we like—I do not know what—how high the ocean looks from the beach?

So, here is the story about my lone assertion of the disgustingness of the rat that very plausibly does not attribute chauvinism to me: I ate the rat, I did not like it, and I spit it out, crying. What came out of my mouth was close to, “Blech! Ack!” I do not care so much about rationally defending claims about disgustingness, but they are fine ways to express what I do not like, and to find out where I share gustatory sensibilities with others, so I have a default strategy to use them to do things like that. Furthermore, I express it in the form

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<sup>42</sup>The story can be told, but it will not necessarily be effective if the subjectivist’s motivation for thinking about the “quickness” of assertion comes from somewhere I have yet to notice. I will say more about this possibility in the next chapter.

of an assertion that it is disgusting, which I am prepared to defend because it is a genuine assertion. But of course I know I will not defend it *well* (and who cares?).

Now, is there a worry that I am *believing* something beyond my epistemic means because of how quickly I asserted something? But do I even believe that this rat is disgusting? I do not know. The case is underdescribed. Maybe the rat tail is really rubbery and bland. Maybe the rat meat is dry, tough and bland. Those sound like disgusting things to eat. Or, more likely, I have not fully deliberated yet.<sup>43</sup> Very likely, I need to ask myself whether I am just prejudiced—maybe the meat is tender and the tail tastes like crispy frites, and I am just scared by the mythology of dirty rats that conjures up horrifying images in me when I eat it. We can test me about my beliefs. Have someone sit me down and tell me that there is money at stake. I have to bet on whether this rat tastes good. If I think the meat was in fact tender, and the tail tastes like crispy frites, which are good, but I cannot help but feel disgusted by the thought of rats, do you think I would bet very highly on its tasting terrible? No. Not, say, compared to slimy, wet toast. If you then ask me why I asserted the way I did, I will have a decent answer: “Why not? This is not a high-stakes game for me. (And anyway, issuing the assertion will at least bring me the pleasure of expressing my initial reaction and may very well help me figure out what I do believe and who is like me.)”

Furthermore, even in the lone case of quick assertion, we need to remember that we can still imagine someone does come along and challenge my assertion: “Why do you think the rat is so disgusting? The meat is tender, you like gaminess in meat, and the tail tastes like crispy frites; what is wrong with that?” If I have no answer at all, we would *not* detect that I was perfectly in the right to have been so quick about my assertion. I was *not* completely “free” to so assert. If I sort of have an answer—not quite complete and not quite non-circular, as so often happens in matters of taste—then we feel about my assertion as we typically feel about taste assertions: it was fine, it served a purpose or two, he cannot very easily fulfill any dialectical goals with it, but, oh well, leave him be. The lone assertion does not essentially change the story I have told in the previous section. Perhaps when I am alone, I am a bit less worried about the consequences of not carefully asserting (i.e., asserting while being careful about making sure I will be able to defend my assertion against challenges in such ways as to fulfill dialectical goals). This is not irrational or epistemically chauvinistic. It is just realistic dialectical laziness; I know I’m probably going to get away with it, like I know I’m probably going to get away with driving 46mph in the 45mph zone.

Finally, while we have examples where I quickly come out with a taste assertion, we also have *plenty* of examples where we do not quickly come out with taste assertions. I am not alone eating that rat, let us say. I am in the middle of a group of people who I think have generally good taste, but who really like these rats. I feel much less of a sense that I would very quickly just assert, “God, this stuff is disgusting.” Maybe I will just as quickly make a face—maybe I cannot help it but come out with the words, my default strategy of using it nonchalantly being so ingrained in me. But it is relevant that even if I cannot stop myself, I

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<sup>43</sup>I think it would be incorrect to think we generally or normally fully deliberate something before we assert it. Sometimes—*often*—we assert it first in order to publicly deliberate it.

may feel hesitation or regret at it having come out of my mouth. After all, what do I know? I have only tried the rat once; I am probably blinded by my thinking rats are dirty, even if I have been reliably assured that they are perfectly clean; and I know how easy it is to be culturally chauvinistic. I do not think these further intuitions about my mindset are at all uncommon.

### 3.8 How About Some Positive Reasons?

So I think the potential for disagreements like our paradigm “intractable” one above between Zack and Sayaka do not give us strong reason to think that we run a serious epistemic risk in issuing forth in taste judgments as often and as comfortably as we seem to do. However, my so thinking is based on a completely negative argument: I argue that the subjectivist’s worries based on the Ease and Allowance we see in taste disputes (and assertions that have the potential to give rise to such disputes) do not exhibit unbearable pressure on the objectivist to attribute chauvinism to ordinary judges because they irrationally ignore epistemic risk. One may wonder, in response to this wholly negative argument: are there any more positive reasons to think that objectivism will allow us to see how there is not this kind of epistemic risk? Yes, I think, there are some reasons. But, as we will see, the kind of reasons we could give will surely satisfy no serious skeptic. Nevertheless, let me present two.

First, in response to the skeptical worry above based on the potential for intractable taste disagreements, we can say something a bit stronger than just that we can explain the sense of Ease and Allowance compatibly with objectivism. As I suggested earlier when discussing objectivist strategies, we can instead just deny (1), which was:

- (1) There is comparatively large potential for intractable taste disagreement (where intractability is just characterized by paradigmatic examples and not in a way that obviously begs the question against objectivism).

If we deny (1), we can say that, even if there is reason to worry *if* there is comparatively large potential for intractable taste disagreement, *in fact* there is no such potential. And we should deny (1) because taste disagreements like our “paradigmatic” one above between Zack and Sayaka are not the only cases of taste disagreements; there are plenty of realistic taste disagreements we engage in where it is clear there is nothing (worrisomely) “intractable” going on—and not just because we are disagreeing only about the non-gustatory (or, as one might be tempted to say, the “natural” or “non-evaluative”) facts. In fact, we already considered many such disagreements in our preliminary classification of various ways disagreements might run into impasse, or misfire, or be caught up in confusion.

To remind ourselves of how much we share as far as gustatory sensibilities go, we can start with particular gustatory facts. It would surprise none of us if investigation revealed that most people do not find feces or tiny rocks very delicious and do not find some fresh, sweet fruit very disgusting. We would not be surprised if many people think that a clean Ikea table tastes pretty bland; that fruit tastes better than stale, dry bread; that rotten flesh

infested with maggots (and unassociated with any social rituals) is more disgusting than al dente pasta; that consuming a small, even mix of grains, meat, and vegetables is better than being force-fed 25 pounds of ice cream. This kind of list can be extended for a long time.

Furthermore, our agreement does not only occupy shallow waters. In addition to particular facts, we also seem to agree on a number of criteria for deliciousness. Our last example above shows that we agree that a balance of flavors tend to count in favor of something's deliciousness, whereas an overabundance of one taste, texture, or the like, tends to count against something's deliciousness. Referencing my earlier characterizations of a variety of taste disagreements, we might remind ourselves that we readily accept that matters of health and moral qualms, mere socio-economic power, pride in your hometown baseball stadium, expectation of sex, and lavish customer service are all not to be confused with how good something tastes.

It gets even deeper, our agreement. We also readily accept that certain facts about what sorts of explanations seem adequate for why someone who disagrees with us does so, and we readily accept that some explanations give us reason to pause and worry about our judgments, while others do not. In other words, just as we take on differing evaluative attitudes towards some acquisitions of taste over others, as I argued in Chapter 1, we also take on differing evaluative attitudes towards some of these explanations of disagreements versus others. It is commonplace to cite tastes and practices that are very alien to our home culture in order to get us to worry about “widespread” disagreement. But notice that for many of these “alien” practices, it is not as if we are just faced with the practice and we can do nothing but remain silent. If we were to ask, for instance, why someone from America might not like (or why someone “alien” to us does like) stinky cheese (in France) or stinky tofu (in Taiwan) or cobra heart (in Vietnam) or dog (in various parts of Asia), there are myriad sorts of explanations we accept as relevant. There is quite a difference between a person who does not like dog because he cannot imagine doing something as morally horrible as killing a dog for gustatory pleasure; and a person who does not like cobra heart because it is nowhere as tasty as grilled chicken heart.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, we nod our head in understanding if the person who does not like cobra heart explains countering sensibilities in terms of a belief that cobra heart increases male virility; and we cock our heads in puzzlement if the person instead insists that those who like such things lack “moral fiber.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, we judge some of these explanations of these “alien” tastes (and our own attitudes towards these tastes) as better—more justificatory—than others. I suggest this is because we agree on a wide swath of considerations about what counts as *relevant* to questions about whether a person's tastes are formed in accordance with good gustatory reasons, or not.

So, I claim, surface appearances suggest that we often agree on particular facts; on

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<sup>44</sup>It is a familiar enough dining experience to try something “foreign,” gross yourself out “at the thought of it,” and at the very same time realize it tastes wonderfully just like, say, chicken.

<sup>45</sup>The former explanation is even more revealing once we notice broader patterns. Anthony Bourdain likes to point out that while traveling the world he has been offered various bits of food that almost invariably taste disgusting (cobra heart, animal genitalia, and so on) that have been offered in the name of male virility (and, it seems, often with a wink).

what count as relevant considerations in favor of something's being delicious or not (and somebody's likes or dislikes conforming to what is delicious or not); and finally on what count as vindictory as opposed to undermining explanations of our various attitudes towards others' (and our own) tastes. So the skeptic who is relying on the "fact" that there is comparatively large potential for intractable disagreement is not obviously relying on a fact.

The second more "positive" reason I can give is this: we can characterize ordinary cases of chauvinism in judges of matters of taste and see that such cases are not widespread. If so, then we can use this ordinary fact, combined with the fact that we come out with taste judgments relatively easily, as *prima facie* reason to think we are not faced with massive epistemic risk when we judge matters of taste. Ordinary cases of chauvinism about taste involve, roughly, discounting a cuisine, a kind of food, ways of eating, tastes, etc., just because of one's biases in taste; or because of one's conviction that the tastes of a certain elite or circumscribed group are superior because of a distorted sense of that group's powers of discrimination, refinement, cleanliness, superior intelligence, or what not; or because one thinks that one's ability to discern delicious things is better than others' ability, even though there is plenty of uncontroversial evidence suggesting otherwise. Ordinary examples of such chauvinism might include: elitism or snobbery about food; being blinded by ideology governing what is "proper" to eat; being blinded by one's cravings; pursuing social status, adventure or health, in lieu of, but also in the name of, good-tasting things. I do not think we need to paint a rosy picture of ourselves as human judges to think that we are not *constantly* being chauvinistic in these ways. But if we are not, and if we come out with our assertions and judgments with such ease, and if we tend to do so only when there is no hefty epistemic risk, then we have some "positive" reason to think there is no hefty epistemic risk.

### 3.9 A General Epistemological Worry?

I suspect that my "positive" reasons in favor of thinking that we are not under inordinate epistemic risk when we judge matters of taste would not convince a certain kind of firm skeptic. In response to the first point reminding us of the massive amount of taste agreement, the skeptic would probably ask: "Isn't it exactly chauvinistic to just assume that the criteria you say we agree are relevant really are relevant? And aren't all your particular examples of agreement just issued from your own tastes (or our own culture's tastes, or what not)? Isn't the real point that all this can easily be questioned—that is, that there is *hidden* potential for all these points of supposed agreement to turn into intractable disagreements, which gives us cause to lower our confidence?" In response to the second point suggesting that we are not chauvinistic all the time, he would probably wonder pretty much the same thing: "Doesn't it just beg the question to assume that those 'ordinary' examples of chauvinism are the only cases of *real* chauvinism? You are just relying on the very practices—in this case of classifying cases of chauvinism—that I have been putting into question."

Such skeptical responses, which I will here leave vague, would be telling because they suggest that the skepticism here is driven less by studied examination of the "amount"

of controversy and non-controversy in a given area, or the “amount” of chauvinism in a given area, and more by a general epistemological skepticism that refuses to allow us to use “practice-internal” epistemic notions to answer questions about whether the judgments we make are in fact as epistemically fit as we think (“assume”) they are. I end this chapter with a point about how to understand these sorts of worries in the context of our dialectic.

I have been attempting throughout these chapters to search for motivations for subjectivism about matters of gustatory taste. In doing so, I have searched only for motivations drawn from a realistic description—as non-theoretically-loaded as possible—of our gustatory practices. I have *not* addressed what we might think of as “theoretical” considerations directly concerning the metaphysical status of matters of gustatory taste. These skipped considerations also include any that involve the epistemology of judging matters of taste, insofar as those are relevant to determining the metaphysical status of such matters.<sup>46</sup> The nature of such a search for motivations is such that the following is true. Nothing that is said defending objectivism against supposed motivations for subjectivism derived from investigation of our gustatory practices is very effective against the different issue of what theoretical considerations there may be to think that matters of gustatory taste are subjective (or that the nature of gustatory reasons is such that they are not “distinctive”). The same is true for whatever theoretical considerations there may be to think that the epistemology of gustatory taste is problematic (if gustatory matters are construed as objective). I count the nascent form of skepticism expressed above as such a theoretical consideration concerning the epistemology of taste.

This form of skepticism does not start with a realistic description of our gustatory practices.<sup>47</sup> And this is exactly why the skeptic gives the kinds of responses he does to my “positive reasons.” It is because the skeptic is unmoved by the fact that we “ordinarily” agree about all sorts of gustatory issues, and the fact that we “ordinarily” are not chauvinistic about all sorts of gustatory matters, that the skeptic thinks the “positive reasons” have missed the point. What this kind of skeptic probably starts off with is a conception about what counts as chauvinism, as well as a conception of what counts as an epistemically worrisome disagreement. The epistemically worrisome disagreements are the ones that could *possibly* turn into ones whereby you cannot discount another person’s standards for judging some gustatory matter except via standards that the other person will not accept; and chauvinism just is the characteristic a judge exhibits when they go ahead and discount those other standards in exactly that way. If you start with these conceptions—perhaps they are motivated by independent theoretical considerations?—then nothing I have said in this chapter will move you.

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<sup>46</sup>Presumably, figuring out an epistemology for matters of taste may be (epistemically) relevant to determining the metaphysical status of such matters, even if epistemological points do not entail metaphysical ones.

<sup>47</sup>Or at least, it does not start with anything like a “survey,” even in a broad sense of that term. It needs to be conceded that part of understanding the force of epistemic skepticism resides in the fact that the skeptic does rely on at least *some* aspects of our ordinary practice—in particular the one whereby we draw an ordinary distinction between what we commonly do and think in practice and what is actually so.

Although I cannot here debunk the “direct” epistemological worry exemplified by the above nascent skeptical responses to my “positive reasons,” I do want to issue one reminder: such a worry is completely general. Nothing about it requires us to first look at gustatory matters in particular in order to become worried about the epistemic status of our taste judgments. This means that the worry, if plausible at all, applies to any area where we can apply its conceptions of chauvinism and epistemically worrisome disagreements. And where can we *not* apply such conceptions? The worry seems to apply to the moral and aesthetic case as easily as the gustatory case, since, if any disputes are going to count as “intractable,” many moral and aesthetic ones will. And the worry applies to any area of discourse where there is even a bare possibility of needing to “circularly” defend one’s judgments. This may very well happen in perfectly objective areas of discourse.<sup>48</sup> And it may very well underlie some of the worry involved in traditional epistemological skepticism about empirical judgments about the external world.<sup>49</sup>

If what we have here is a completely general skeptical worry, then we should remember that such a worry cannot give us reason to think that there is something especially obviously subjective about matters of gustatory taste; or that the peculiar nature of gustatory reasons is to be especially contrasted with that of reasons in other areas. Resting on a general epistemic worry counts, I think, as a failure to find a motivation for thinking that matters of gustatory taste are *paradigm* instances of the merely subjective.

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<sup>48</sup>See (Boghossian, 2006).

<sup>49</sup>The idea there would be that one can only rest content with the epistemic usefulness of one’s perceptions if one already “assumes” that they “reach all the way out to the world,” but on what “neutral” basis could one rule out possibilities whereby such perceptions do not so reach?

Perhaps one may think that epistemological skepticism about the external world is very different from the kind of skepticism we have encountered here because the former does not rest on the potential for intractable disagreements. However, arguably, a general epistemic skepticism based on the potential for intractable disagreement rests on the premise that being unable to “independently” discount another’s disagreeing opinion requires one to lower one’s confidence. And epistemological skepticism about the external world seems to rest on a similar premise: that being unable to “independently” discount the possibility of, say, our being brains in vats epistemically requires one to lower one’s confidence. It is, I think, just making things more vivid if we imagine a potential interlocutor (or malevolent demon) “questioning our senses.”

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## Chapter 4

# Gustatory “Warrant” and “Superhard” Cases

### 4.1 Introduction

By the end of Chapter 2, I was left with the subjectivist’s claim that we sense that we can make gustatory judgments “just” or “easily” on the basis of our own tastes, and that this cannot be explained by objectivism. I also briefly suggested that this kind of subjectivist worry is based on a sense that there is something “fishy” about understanding taste disputes in an objectivist manner, something that would make ordinary tasters seem “chauvinistic.” I took this suggestion up in Chapter 3 and argued that objectivism can make sense of taste disputes; that what is going on in them is a certain kind of dialectical nonchalance. In this chapter, I want to take up a different way of understanding the above subjectivist worry.

Although I do not think we need to be tied to this vocabulary, it may help first to note and separate out two motivations hidden behind one label for what has commonly been thought of as a motivation for subjectivism: the existence of so-called “faultless disagreement.” One is just the motivation I dealt with in the last chapter—it emphasizes the *disagreement* side of “faultless disagreement” and suggests that something about disagreement shows us that objectivism cannot really respect *one* important sense of “faultlessness,” namely, the “ease” with which we make taste assertions in the face of intractable taste disputes. I already argued against that motivation, but there is another one, or at least there seems to be another one. It abstracts away from the issue of disagreement and focuses solely on the notion of faultlessness. That “more direct” motivation is what I am taking up in this chapter, even though, as I have suggested before, there is a real danger that this motivation just begs the question against objectivism.

The notion of faultlessness seems to have *something* to do with warrant or justification. My goal in this chapter will be to ask whether we can make out some notion of “warrant” that we can actually see in our gustatory practices that would then motivate us to move towards a subjectivist understanding of what is going on in talk of matters of taste. I

attempt to look at the making and evaluating of taste assertions to see if there is any way in which objectivism needs to say something about “warrant” for assertions that distorts our gustatory practices. I will compare various forms of subjectivism to objectivism on this issue because part of the issue here is whether they really substantively differ.

One form of subjectivism, contextualism, does differ from objectivism about its *understanding* of warrant, but it is not entirely clear whether the way warrant shows up in our practice points towards contextualism over objectivism. It may be thought that, because objectivism does not allow that one’s tastes—mere likes, enjoyments, and so on—at all constitute the deliciousness of something or that the truth of gustatory judgments is essentially dependent on tastes, that the objectivist thus cannot think that warrant for assertion is “easy.” I argue (in a bit more detail than I have in previous chapters) that, unless “ease” is *just* a label for subjectivism, objectivism seems equally able to make undistorted sense of “ease” of warrant as it might actually appear in the making and evaluating of taste assertions.

Things are less straightforward with a different form of subjectivism: relativism. Relativism’s dismissal of objectivism may not differ from contextualism’s, in which case the above argument applies. It, may, however, be thought of as appealing to a *special*, initially difficult-to-understand set of commitments with regard to the making and evaluating of taste assertions, on which we may evaluate some taste assertion as incorrect, independently of the asserter’s tastes, but we also, in some sense and at the same time, “allow” the assertion as being nevertheless “correct relative to the asserter’s tastes.” If this is supposed to mark an issue beyond what we have already seen with contextualism (and the worries about taste disputes in the last chapter), it is unclear what phenomenon would make manifest this combination of commitments. Though we *can* describe the combination, *if* we describe it using the relativist’s technical notion of “assessment-sensitive truth” and relativized notion of assertion correctness, we are not sure what those notions amount to—what their practical upshot is beyond that of objectivism’s understanding of “warrant” or “justification.”

So, in the last part of this chapter, I try to find a concrete phenomenon to make sense of the above “special” combination of commitments. I land on the idea that the plurality of gustatory goods sometimes generates “superhard” cases of comparison or judgment whereby we feel pulled to weigh up widely different gustatory goods, yet we also feel pulled to thinking of them as somehow “on a par,” or as being goods which exemplify values that are not “commensurable.” These “parity” cases are hard cases for objectivists to understand, I suggest, and they may be cases that motivate some form of subjectivism, perhaps even relativism (especially since they seem to some to motivate a *special* comparative relation, beyond “better or worse than” and “equally good,” with a *special* rational-practical upshot for choice on the basis of comparative judgment). Given that the cases seem to be difficult cases independently of there being taste disputes or resistance to testimony, the cases are a promising area to look to get closer to the supposed “bare” intuition that “we simply can make gustatory judgments just on the basis of our own tastes.”

I give, at the end of the chapter, an avenue of objectivist resistance to these supposed “superhard” cases, but I concede that more investigation is needed before we have a satisfying

understanding of them (or the illusion of them).

## 4.2 How “Easy” is it to Judge Matters of Taste?

Typically the term “faultless” is used to describe taste disagreements—ones where, in some sense, the disagreements are genuine but they are so “intractable” (or some such thing) that each disputant seems to be “not in the wrong” in asserting what they do. Besides worrying, however, whether there is not something peculiar going on when we disagree about matters of taste, we might just think that taste judgments are themselves peculiarly “faultless” in some way. It is preferable, I think, to look for any such peculiarities in concrete phenomena. As we have seen, some have thought the phenomenon is that gustatory judgments seem to be comparatively “easier” to make. If so, this may be because justification of such judgments is based solely on our likes and dislikes (or dispositions to enjoy or not). However, the intuition that it is comparatively easy to make gustatory judgments seems too close to the supposed ease of justifying such judgments, and the supposed ease of justifying such judgments is nothing more than exactly the feature of justification that falls out of a subjectivist’s understanding of it. So appeal to the intuition seems question-begging, and does not really allow us to understand and respond to the motivations for subjectivism.

Perhaps a better way to go is to look at how we make assertions about matters of taste, and our attitudes towards those assertions. So, perhaps it is somehow “easier” to make taste assertions; or perhaps we have certain kinds of “more-forgiving” attitudes towards taste assertions already made.<sup>1</sup> Recall the example I discussed in the last chapter: I would not look at the lower level of the ocean at the beach one morning, jump back, and quickly cry out, “Climate change is happening!”; but I might eat a rat for the first time, spit it out, and quickly cry out, “That is disgusting!” Also, if I did cry out “Climate change is happening!” you might quickly challenge me: “How do you know that? Just because you noticed the ocean drop a bit one morning at your local beach?!” But if I cried out “That is disgusting” in response to the rat, you might not as quickly challenge me: “How do you know that? Just because you tried the rat once and it tasted bad to you?”

But in fact, unless they are tied to the issue I already discussed in the last chapter about taste disagreement, even these intuitions about assertion seem to me to be too close to the subjectivist’s claim that gustatory justification needs to be based on one’s tastes. For it is not any kind of “ease” we care about in considering the making of taste assertions; and it is not any kind of “forgiving” attitude we care about in considering our attitudes towards those assertions. Merely *quickly* asserting something can be understood in all sorts of ways seemingly benign to the objectivist (I gave one in the last chapter). I think it is pretty obvious that the immediately relevant contrast in the above cases is meant to be that between the speaker’s needing to assert, in the taste case, merely on the (epistemic)

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<sup>1</sup>In Chapter 3, the sense I ended up giving to “allowing” others’ assertions was a dialectical one: others, like us, are within their rights to play the assertion game in a nonchalant way. The sense of “allowance” or “forgiveness” here is so far unclear.

basis of what he likes (or his experience of enjoying), and in the climate change case, being able to assert on the (epistemic) basis of what reasons there are, independently of his own preferences, desires and fleeting experiences, to think climate change is occurring. But if this is the way the cases are meant, it seems to me that they are simply built to reflect the subjectivist's conception of justification.

Still, we cannot always make absolutely sure we are separating theory from intuition before we assess theories. So we should still try to look at taste assertions—considered by themselves (or as much so by themselves as is possible)—and see if there is anything about them that suggests that it is, so to speak, the justificatory kind of “ease” and “forgiveness” we supposedly see in our practices. Because it is somewhat unclear to me, once we bracket the various phenomena discussed in the previous chapters, what the concrete intuition here about taste assertions is supposed to be, what I propose to do is to deviate from my pattern of more thoroughly laying out a phenomenon first. Instead, I will consider particular forms of subjectivism that attempt to make theoretical sense of this “ease” and “forgiveness”, and ask the question of how such attempts say something different than what an objectivist would (could/should) say about the making of taste assertions. There are paradigmatic forms of subjectivism that seem to differ from objectivism about how “easy” it is to make taste assertions or how “forgiving” we are of them. But there are also forms of subjectivism where things are muddier. I consider both.

### 4.3 The Making of Taste Assertions (Objectivism vs Contextualism)

To begin to draw contrasts between objectivism and paradigm forms of subjectivism on the issue of how “quickly” or how “easily” one makes taste assertions, let us consider the way one form of subjectivism, contextualism, deals with taste assertions. Recall that contextualism has it that “X is delicious,” as used at context C, is true iff X is delicious according to tastes T of the user in C.<sup>2</sup> Contextualism, to respect the subjectivist spirit, will want to understand “tastes” as likes and dislikes, or dispositions to have certain positive gustatory reactions, where those are understood independently of distinctively gustatory reasons. Furthermore, presumably, this view will think of “warrant” for an assertion that some item is delicious as being the same as warrant for thinking that the item is delicious “according to” the tastes of the asserter at the context of use. In other words, the contextualist will

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<sup>2</sup>It does not matter for our discussion whether this contextualism is a “standard” kind, where the proposition expressed by such assertions vary with the (tastes at the) context of use, or a “non-indexical” kind, where the proposition expressed does not so vary (though the truth varies with the (tastes at) the circumstance of evaluation. The latter may have an easier time understanding the second variation of “warrant” for gustatory assertions I mention below, but it is certainly not impossible for the former to do so as well. What does matter for our discussion is that contextualism, though it relativizes truth, does not relativize the accuracy or correctness of assertion, as relativism does. I follow MacFarlane (2005, p. 25-26) in thinking of “relativism” as making accuracy “perspectival,” or “non-absolute.”

think of warrant for making a taste assertion to amount to whatever warrant one has for thinking that one's likes or dispositions to enjoy are such that one will like/enjoy the (taste of the) item in question. If one will like/enjoy it, then one has warrant for asserting that the item is delicious. The view may also add, with no real consequences to the discussion here, that warrant for taste assertions may also sometimes come from warrant for thinking that some tastes rather than others are "good to have" in some context.<sup>3</sup> If all this is so, the objectivist cannot agree with the contextualist about what warrant an assertion that something is delicious has. This was already clear in Chapter 1, where we saw that the contextualist thinks of reasons for thinking something delicious as *needing* to be essentially sourced in one's interests, purposes or tastes. If that is the nature of the reasons for thinking something delicious, then warrant for assertion, as long as it is based on good reasons for thinking what is asserted, will also need to depend on our interests, purposes or tastes.

With this conception of warrant, the contextualist will think of the "ease" involved in the making of taste assertion as a reflection of how easy it is to have warrant for a taste assertion. As long as you like something—as long as you have a preference for it, or as long as you (would) enjoy it, gustatorily—you have warrant for the assertion.<sup>4</sup> Since there is no prominent barrier to determining what your preferences are, or whether you do (or would) enjoy something, there is no prominent barrier to determining what your warrant is. Presumably this is to be contrasted with the case of ordinary empirical matters. Typically, warrant for assertions about those matters will not depend on your likes, and it is typically more difficult to determine whether you have warrant for such assertions since the warrant will depend on accessing features of the world to which you have more difficult epistemic access than your own likes and dispositions to enjoy.

What about an objectivist? Must the objectivist deny that asserters have "easy" warrant for their assertions? I have already touched on this question in the last two chapters. Here I want to discuss it in more detail. The answer to it obviously depends on how an objectivist specifically understands "warrant." An objectivist will be happy allowing that asserters are very often "reasonable" in their assertions. Furthermore, the objectivist can allow that this means more than simply that asserters need not be stupid (nobody in this debate needs to deny *that*). He can also allow that, *according to some person's tastes*, something is to be judged delicious (or not). But the idea of "accord with one's tastes" might

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<sup>3</sup>One would have to tell a story about how this works, but it is of no consequence here as long as "good to have" is ultimately understood consistently with subjectivism.

<sup>4</sup>There is a little hiccup for any warrant for taste assertion that supposedly comes from "adjudicating" the tastes themselves. If such adjudication about which tastes are "good to have" in a particular context rests on more psychological factors than our likes and dispositions to enjoy, then such adjudication may be more "difficult." Still, the contextualist can maintain that most warrant comes from just determining whether one likes or is disposed to enjoy something.

Another hiccup here is that even a contextualist will say that a taster also needs to know "what the item tastes like." This is, presumably, constituted by the "non-evaluative" or "natural" features of the item. But can't those features be difficult to know? Yes. But the idea here is that, according to an objectivist, the taster will *also* need to know *evaluative* facts as well, and that is supposedly more difficult than just knowing what you enjoy.

seem somewhat mysterious for an objectivist, especially since he is no longer restricted to thinking that “tastes” must mean something like “mere likes or dispositions to enjoy.” “Accordance with tastes” can mean a variety of things for an objectivist, and it will be useful to lay some of them out.

The most obvious way in which an objectivist might want to understand “accord with tastes” is along the lines of “accord with an accepted standard of gustatory judgment,” where the standard, though accepted by the judge, need not be valid or correct—it need not be a standard that issues in or calls for actually correct judgments. (Of course, judges, if rational, will accept standards they *think* are valid.) For an objectivist, this way of thinking of “accord with tastes” will not necessarily line up with another way of understanding it, on which it means “accord with one’s likes or dispositions to enjoy.” A standard of judgment just picks out whatever (one thinks) determines what is genuinely delicious—whatever makes something delicious as opposed to not delicious. But for an objectivist, whatever determines what is genuinely delicious does not include subjective factors such as one’s likes or experiences of enjoyment (or interests or purposes).<sup>5</sup> So an objectivist will not think a standard of judgment cites subjective factors such as likes or experiences of enjoyment. So the objectivist must separate “accord with tastes,” understood as “accord with an accepted standard,” from “accord with tastes,” understood as “accord with mere likes or dispositions to enjoy.”

Two different senses of accord; how exactly does the objectivist allow the latter? As I said, the objectivist needs to admit that liking, by itself, does not have anything to do with what determines or constitutes something’s being delicious. This is just the metaphysical analogue of the central claim I have considered: that gustatory reasons need not be essentially sourced in one’s tastes and paradigm such reasons are not. Nevertheless, so far nothing prevents the objectivist from allowing that one’s liking something can be a form of *access* to whatever does determine or constitute something’s deliciousness. In fact, one’s preferences for certain foods, one’s experiences of enjoyment, and one’s dispositions to have such experiences can all be forms of access. None of these things can be thought by the objectivist as determining gustatory facts about deliciousness and some of them are “responsive” to independently-understood gustatory reasons (rather than gustatory reasons being paradigmatically dependent on them because they partially constitute deliciousness). But they can nonetheless give us defeasible reason to believe one way or another about some gustatory matter. This is especially true if they are the experiences and preferences of a reliable taster: a taster who reliably tracks the gustatory facts through his or her senses and sensibilities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>I put the point in this negative way because I do not want to commit an objectivist to being someone who must himself give a constitutive or reductive account of deliciousness—say in terms of the chemical structures of food. Nevertheless, the issue of whether deliciousness is reducible is not completely unrelated to the issue here. For it seems difficult to talk of a “standard of judgment” at all without saying anything about the standard’s citing features of things that “make it” delicious. I will speak about standards in this way, but I do not think this way of speaking *must* be understood to mean that deliciousness is reducible to other things.

<sup>6</sup>Why would preferences be decent guides? Because they were formed in accord with good gustatory

We need to be “in a good case” or we need to have good reason to think we are in a good case for preferences and experiences of enjoyment to give us good gustatory reason. But this is just to say that such things give us only defeasible reason, or only give us reason in certain circumstances, which is hardly surprising. If we never enjoy what is actually good or our preferences are highly irresponsive to what is actually delicious, then our experiences of enjoyment and our preferences fail to indicate what they normally can. Nothing so far prevents the objectivist from allowing that people often have decent reason to think their likes and experiences of enjoyment indicate to them delicious things.<sup>7</sup> This would be decent but possibly inaccurate or misleading reason.<sup>8</sup>

So far, then, the objectivist seems to allow that asserters may be “reasonable” or “warranted” in a number of relatively strong senses: not only do (mistaken) taste assertions need not have been made out of stupidity; the asserters may also have justifiably relied on their preferences or their experiences of enjoyment to judge; the asserters may have been justified (and even correct) in thinking that the standard they accepted in fact dictated the judgment they made; and they may even have reasonably thought that the standard they accepted was the correct/valid one. In all these cases, of course, the asserters may have been misleadingly justified.

But what about *ease* of warrant? Does the objectivist really allow a sense of ease as opposed to just the bare *possibility* of an assertion’s being warranted? This may be a worry, but we need to see what concrete phenomenon one is pointing to to suggest that the objectivist is really “predicting” a noticeably different landscape of “ease” of warrant than the contextualist. If one just *defines* “ease” of warrant to mark the fact that the objectivist needs to distinguish between “accord with standard” and “accord with likes (or experiences of enjoyment),” then this just begs the question against objectivism. So we need more than

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reasons. This is what we look to if we ask someone with good taste, “What kind of art/food do you like?” What about experiences of enjoyment? This is a more difficult question; I discuss it more below.

<sup>7</sup>I assume here, of course, that the forms of epistemic skepticism that I considered in the last chapter have not been independently established.

<sup>8</sup> Schafer (2011) suggests that the objectivist should think of the “lack of mistake” that we detect in taste asserters in terms of the fact that such asserters share a “second-order” norm that takes them from their individual responses to their beliefs; so that although each has different responses (one mistaken and the other not), they each are believing in accord with those responses. I think that this is correct; however, the objectivist cannot simply rest content suggesting there is such a norm. He must also answer why we should think there is such a norm, *if* as objectivists we also think that such responses do not (even partially) *determine* or *constitute* deliciousness. If there is such a norm, we are not following it because it is allowing us to access that which makes something deliciousness, in the way we might follow a norm that tells us to believe that p when we have a perceptual experience that p because such experiences take us all the way to the relevant facts (by being experiences as of exactly those facts). This kind of disanalogy needs to be explicitly acknowledged by the objectivist. One complication: Schafer notes that a “response-dependent” account of deliciousness is compatible with his “objectivism.” This is because his objectivism is just the denial of a certain form of subjectivism *built into* the semantics of taste predicates. This is not yet the denial of any kind of “response-dependence” that is not built into our semantics. Perhaps some kind of metaphysics of “response-dependence” will have an easier time allowing that Schafer’s “second-order norms” take responses to beliefs. I will not deal with such complications here.

just that.

Let us consider the worry that the objectivist must say that asserters should always just discount or ignore their likes and enjoyments, which are, after all, not relevant to “determining” what is in fact delicious. So, the worry goes, the objectivist must say that asserters have more difficulty gaining warrant because they need to justifiably think they are accessing deliciousness and the evaluative features that make something delicious. But nothing so far actually forces an objectivist to think that asserters must always or even “often” just discount or ignore their likes and dislikes. Consider this analogy. Suppose you had a special device that lights up every time a male chicken crosses in front of your eyes and stays unlit if a female chicken crosses in front of your eyes. Suppose that if you did not have this special device, you would have to carefully look at the chicken to determine whether it is male or female. If I had to form beliefs about the sex of a chicken, I would use the device—it would be easier. Even an objectivist can think of our preferences and experiences of enjoyment as being “easy to use,” like the chicken-sex detector is. We often utilize them to form beliefs because it is easier to utilize them, as long as we are within our rights to assume they are reliable indicators. There are some exceptions and complications to this general idea, but the claim that we at least often rely on our likes and experiences of enjoyment seems right and consistent with objectivism.<sup>9</sup>

It is helpful, I think, to contrast the above somewhat forceful worry with the following rather less forceful worry. The above worry relied on the idea that we rely on our experiences of enjoyment or our preferences to determine warrant for an assertion, or to determine whether we should (in the relevant sense) go ahead and assert. This intuitive idea is *not* properly expressed in the following way: we think that one’s own experiences of an item are sufficient for warrant for assertions about the deliciousness of the item. The problem with this idea is that it is too unclear what sort of “experiences of the items” it is referring to. So, for instance, do we mean to draw an analogy with the following kind of norm for believing something about an ordinary empirical matter—if you have a perceptual experience that *p*, then you have warrant for asserting/believing that *p*? If so, then the analogy would be that if one has an experience that something is delicious, then one has warrant for asserting/believing that it is delicious. But of course, the sufficiency in that claim is something the objectivist would be perfectly happy with, and if we want to think that it is “easy” to have experiences like the above, then the objectivist is happy doing so (though there seems to be

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<sup>9</sup>One may immediately begin to worry that we cannot really think we have reliable indicators if so many people disagree with us. But then an argument will have to be given; it may be just the one we discussed in Chapter 3, or it may be some independent, general epistemological worry not specific to the taste case. Or it may be some argument that does decrease how often our likes and enjoyments reliably indicate; but objectivism may “match up” pretty closely with our intuitions about this. So, I find it reasonable to take *some* of bare likes and enjoyments as reliable—I do not similarly have at my disposal, say, “climate change likes.” Of course, we have many bare likes and enjoyments that are not reliable; but then we do not just often freely rely on those (see below). I may more often use other gustatory reactions beyond merely liking or barely enjoying, but then the objectivist can suggest “thickening” those reactions, as I will suggest in a moment. So I do not think there is yet a clear reason to think we feel “ease” even when we have reason to think some of our (bare/thin) gustatory reactions are unreliable.



no reason to). But just as obviously, this analogy is not what the subjectivist has in mind.<sup>10</sup> Presumably, the sufficiency a subjectivist cares about here is the sufficiency for gustatory warrant of experiences that are understood as *less than* full-blown gustatory experiences as of, e.g., the good and well-balanced flavor of something. One way of expressing such sufficiency is exactly in terms of the reasonable worry above—that our “enjoying” something is sufficient for us to have warrant.

This juxtaposition of the reasonable worry earlier and the misguided worry above brings out two important issues. First, the subjectivist, noticing the contrast between the “thick” experience as of something’s being delicious and “thin” ones such as bare gustatory enjoyments and reactions, may begin to demand more from the objectivist: “You can allow that we sometimes use our bare enjoyments and such as indicators of deliciousness that give us warrant to make gustatory assertions, but what we are really looking for is more *direct* warrant—warrant that derives from accessing features that partially constitute something’s being delicious. I can allow that our enjoyments give us warrant of the latter kind; you cannot.” And it is true that the objectivist cannot say that any warrant we gain from utilizing our likes and enjoyments is gained because those likes and enjoyments partially constitute something’s deliciousness (or is that which partially makes it true that something is delicious). But is the demand just that we need that warrant the objectivist cannot give? That would be question-begging. What else is at stake?

Notice—and this brings us to the second issue—that the juxtaposition of “thick” and “thin” gustatory experiences raises a question about all this talk of “gustatory experiences,” “gustatory pleasure,” “intrinsically positive gustatory reactions,” and so on. Although I have been assuming throughout these chapters that there will be some body of gustatory reactions whose content is considerably less “full-blown” than that of experiences as of something’s being delicious, I do not think this means that we should be thinking of all gustatory experiences as having *extremely* “thin” content.<sup>11</sup> I have already suggested that gustatory likes are responsive to gustatory reasons. I would also suggest at least some distinctive gustatory reactions—like the kind of pleasure derived from the robust richness of a hearty soup—have some “evaluative” content built into them, or at least depend on our being disposed to make

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<sup>10</sup>This is also why we should be careful *just* pointing to an analogy between our “reliance on experience” in the ordinary empirical case and the taste case in order to dispel subjectivist worries. (Schafer relies on this analogy several times. (2011, pp. 274, 279, 282).)

<sup>11</sup>A parallel with what is sometimes called the “problem of empirical content” might be instructive. Many epistemologists-cum-philosophers of perception find themselves trying to ride a line between extreme “Myth of the Given” and extreme “disjunctivist” conceptions of experience (and of experience’s ability to warrant belief), on the one hand hoping to save the idea that perceptual experience “warrants” (as opposed to merely causes) belief, and on the other, hoping to avoid simply “presupposing” in the content of such experiences exactly what seems “wanting” for warrant. Similarly, if we find ourselves discussing the issue of how gustatory experience can even *hope to* warrant our gustatory judgments “in the first place,” we might want to sail between the Scylla of overly-thin gustatory experiences and the Charybdis of uninformatively thick ones. On the general issue, I myself tend to drift as dangerously close to Charybdis as I feel I can, though I of course cannot address this huge issue here. But even I think that not *all* gustatory experiences can be understood as *simply* instances of our, say, seeing that something is delicious, period. Such an idea seems to trample over the many differences between the many kinds of gustatory reactions we can have.

some evaluative judgments, like the judgment that the soup is robust and rich, where that is understood to at least *ceteris paribus* count as the soup being delicious. If this is so, then objectivist can say that *sometimes* our gustatory reactions are not *mere* indicators of what is delicious; sometimes our gustatory reactions take us all the way to the evaluative features of the item, which partially constitute the item's being delicious, much like sometimes a perceptual experience that p takes us all the way to the fact that p.

So the objectivist will want to say that sometimes our gustatory reactions give us “direct” warrant, in some reasonable sense of that term. So, despite what the subjectivist above said, it is not the supposed directness or indirectness of the warrant that will get the subjectivist anywhere (non-question-beggingly). Is there anything in our practice involving assertions that shows us that we *need* to or at least *should* speak in terms of the subjectivist's understanding of how likes and enjoyments play a role in warrant?

As we already saw, when we only look at the making of assertion, we come up lacking. Remember our pair of cases. I eat a rat, all alone, and I spit it out, very quickly crying, “Oh God, that is disgusting!” I do not look at the level of the ocean, jump back, and very quickly cry out, “Oh God, climate change is happening!” This pair of cases presumably illustrates the “ease” of warrant for taste assertions by marking a difference in the quickness with which we assert. But in addition to the fact that the “quickness” here can be understood in all sorts of benign ways, nothing about this pair of cases itself seems to suggest that we are marking a distinction between likes/enjoyment giving us warrant because they are partially constitutive of deliciousness, and likes/enjoyments giving us warrant because they are our access to deliciousness (whether by indication or by being more like perceptual experiences that p giving us warrant for thinking that p).

More importantly, any plausible subjectivism will actually bring itself *closer* to objectivism on the issue of whether (bare or thin) likes or enjoyments are “sufficient” for justifiably making taste assertions, so that any difference that remains would just be a question-begging clash between the two views. So, for instance, the subjectivist wants us to think that there is something telling about the fact that our enjoying something (and of course, actually tasting it or knowing what it tastes like) is sufficient for justifiably believing something is delicious. But what about very obvious counter-examples like our not enjoying a wine after eating watercress, or enjoying very greasy fries when one is drunk? Either the subjectivist will have to deny seemingly obvious facts about our *not* allowing our likes and experiences of enjoyment to be sufficient for warrant, or he will have to hedge his claim. He may hedge it by just building in exceptions to sufficiency. But then it becomes hard to see what the phenomenon is now supposed to be that points to our especially “easily” making taste assertions. After all, in many cases, it is not easy—as *all* the plausible views should admit, sometimes our likes and our (barely) enjoying things do *not* tell us what is delicious. The subjectivist counts the exceptions as exceptions to the claim of the sufficiency of our likes. The objectivist counts them as cases where we should not rely on our likes. For an objectivist, these would be cases where “accord with our likes” clashes with “accord with our standards”; in such cases, the latter triumphs because the typically reliable link between likes and what is in fact delicious (or the features that constitute deliciousness) is broken. The two differ in their

understanding of warrant, but not obviously in their predictions.

Perhaps the different ways they treat the exceptional cases is important. The subjectivist would think of all the exceptions as cases where there are barriers to our detecting “the taste” of an item—which is understood, presumably, as the “non-evaluative” or “natural” features of it detectable by our sense of taste, smell and touch—since even he will think that we have to know something about the items being tasted in addition to knowing whether we like or enjoy them.<sup>12</sup> The objectivist can think of some of these exceptions as involving our simply having misguided reactions in certain circumstances, or as being cases in which a reliable link between our reactions and what is delicious is broken.

I am not sure the above differences are anything but theoretical differences, but in any case, I do not find the subjectivist’s understanding of the exceptions clearly more plausible. Suppose I know very well the taste of the bourbon ice cream I had last night. Today, right after shoving myself full of cheesecake, I eat the ice cream and I have waves of nausea as I’m eating it. Disgusting? I don’t think so. It’s my favorite ice cream; I know its taste well—it is very good. Also, when I have it in my mouth and it seems really cloying, I know exactly why—because I just ate too much sweet food—so I know the sweetness of it is in fact much weaker than it seems right now. My tasting it is not preventing me from knowing the taste of the item. Perhaps that does not convince you because you think that I do not in fact “know the taste” because what I am tasting “tastes cloying,” which the ice cream is not.<sup>13</sup> Very well; suppose today I am cross but my palate is perfectly fine. What blocks me from knowing—even by direct application of my tongue and nose, so to speak—“the taste of the ice cream?” Nothing. Still, I am cross and weigh too heavily its alcoholic flavor, poorly judging the ice cream imbalanced. My crossness impairs my evaluative judgment.<sup>14</sup>

More can be said, but I hope that it has become unclear whether there is really a concrete phenomenon (or set of phenomena) here pointing away from objectivism and towards subjectivism on the issue of gustatory warrant. Two things are at stake between a contextualist and an objectivist on warrant for gustatory assertions. The first is just the theoretical issue at stake between objectivism and subjectivism: whether gustatory reasons

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<sup>12</sup>Another way to go would be to think of the sufficiency as being, not of occurrent enjoyments (and the like), but of dispositions to enjoy, idealized such dispositions, and so on. This brings in other issues I will not get into here. At bottom and very generally, the subjectivist goal is to maintain some strong enough constitutive connection between enjoyments and deliciousness, for that is the heart of subjectivism, so the subjectivist will tend to think of “impairments” in detection using our enjoyments as either impairment of the detection of the natural features of something, or (less likely) impairment of the detection of the enjoyments. Impairment in detection of deliciousness cannot be a separable form of impairment, lest detection via enjoyment is “too contingent.”

<sup>13</sup>I understand the temptation, but I am not sure about it. First of all, I would understand the temptation more if you want to say it “tastes very sweet,” but *cloyingness* seems to me partially evaluative, and so it seems to me that if it does “taste cloying,” that is still partly because of interference with my good gustatory judgment. Second of all, in at least some cases I feel comfortable saying the ice cream tastes the way it always does, though it also tastes cloying because of my overworked palate; this perhaps in the way the circular coin in front of me both does and does not “appear ovoid.”

<sup>14</sup>Or, maybe my crossness does block my ability to taste its “well-balanced” alcoholic flavor, but its not tasting of “well-balanced” alcohol seems to have evaluative content.

must essentially be sourced in tastes. The second is how much “ease” there is in making taste assertions; how much this has to do with how “easily” taste assertions are warranted; and finally whether contextualism or objectivism would better make sense of such “ease.” I have suggested that, so far, the second issue seems close to collapsing into the first.

## 4.4 The Evaluation of Taste Assertions (Contextualism vs. Relativism)

What about the *evaluation* of taste assertions which have been made? Perhaps the “ease” of warrant that the subjectivist detects comes with the way we evaluate taste assertions. So, for instance, a contextualist thinks of his semantic theory as doing well with respect to how we actually evaluate assertions that have been made. He thinks that we would not, for instance, sense that an assertion needs to be retracted just because we evaluate it as not being in accord with our own tastes. He also thinks that, just because we ourselves would not assert that something is delicious, does not mean that we would view someone’s assertion that it is not delicious as mistaken or incorrect or faulty. Insofar as we do not *criticize* others’ gustatory assertions “as often” as we would their ordinary empirical ones, perhaps this suggests that it is “easier” for them to have warrant. Or, as I put it earlier, we “allow” or are “more forgiving of” their assertions.

Furthermore, notice that the above evaluations of taste assertions are evaluations of their *correctness*. So perhaps this gets us closer to the kind of warrant that the subjectivist seemed to want to focus on: the kind that has to do with warrant gained from accessing features that are relevant to what *makes* something delicious, rather than what merely indicates those features. That is the kind of warrant that the objectivist cannot allow from likes and experiences of enjoyment. Perhaps the (supposed) fact that we evaluate taste assertions in the above way shows us that it is that kind of warrant that would be needed to explain the fact. For our “allowing” others their assertions seems not to just be a matter of our allowing that they are reasonable though mistaken, but rather that they are not mistaken *at all*. One has easy warrant if the *truth* is easy to come by, and the truth is easy to come by if the relevant fact which makes something true is just partially *constituted* by things that are easy to access, like our own likes and experiences (as opposed to allegedly difficult things to access, like evaluative features).

That is the line of thought. The problem is that the supposed fact it relies on—that we evaluate taste assertions in the above way—is not a fact. This has been noticed by subjectivists themselves. In fact, it is a crux of the debate between more standard forms of contextualism (applied to matters of taste) and another semantic theory which relativizes truth in a different way: relativism (about taste).<sup>15</sup> Unlike contextualism, which relativizes truth to a context of use, relativism relativizes truth to a “context of assessment,” and in

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<sup>15</sup>As in Chapter 1, I follow MacFarlane (2005) in calling an assessment-sensitive semantics for gustatory predicates “relativism,” and a use-sensitive semantics “contextualism.”

such a way that a gustatory assertion is correct (relative to a context of assessment) iff what it asserts is true relative to the tastes of the person assessing the assertion.<sup>16</sup>

Although relativism is like contextualism in thinking that tastes play a role in the truth/correctness of a taste assertion, it is unlike contextualism in thinking that an evaluator of an assertion would think of an assertion as mistaken even if the evaluator's tastes differ from the asserter's. Contextualism does not allow this because it thinks that proper evaluation of an assertion involves evaluating it according to the tastes at the *asserter's* context. So according to contextualism, if an evaluator's tastes differ than an asserter's, and the evaluator's tastes call for the evaluator to judge something *not* delicious, still the evaluator may not properly evaluate the asserter's claim that the thing is delicious as mistaken, since it is actually *true* relative to the *asserter's* tastes. Since relativism says that it is the *evaluator's* tastes that matter to the proper evaluation of an assertion, it will allow that the above evaluator can properly evaluate the other's assertion as mistaken, since it is *false* relative to the *evaluator's* tastes. This accords more closely with how we actually evaluate taste assertions, I think. And so it goes against the "fact" that we "allow" others' assertions as "not mistaken at all" even if we ourselves would deny what they assert.

Relatedly, relativism would say that the asserter himself, if he looks back on his assertion and cannot defend its truth relative to his *current* context of assessment, will have to retract that assertion. Contextualism would not say the same, since it would think of the asserter's previous assertion as correct (and so as not demanding retraction), since it is properly evaluated relative to the tastes of the asserter at the *initial* context of use. This is so even if the asserter would not *now* assert such a thing, and in fact would positively disagree (because his tastes have changed). Again I think relativism is closer to the facts, and once again, the facts seem to suggest that we do not "allow" even our own past assertions when we ourselves would evaluate them as incorrect according to our current, differing tastes.

These are facts about how we evaluate the truth/accuracy or not of an assertion. A notion of warrant for assertion comes free with this notion of the accuracy of an assertion (whether relative to some context or not). That notion is exactly that of warrant derived from accessing features that constitute something's deliciousness (accessing whatever it is that makes it true that something is delicious). What this debate between contextualist and relativist seems to suggest is that even subjectivists do not think that it is obvious that there is "ease of warrant" in *that* "objective" sense; we actually seem to very commonly evaluate others' assertions as *mistaken*, and so objectively "unwarranted," when we evaluate them according to our own tastes.<sup>17</sup>

We are thus far still left wanting for some concrete phenomenon of "ease of warrant" that

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<sup>16</sup>Furthermore, the unrelativized object-language predicate "is accurate" can be correctly ascribed to a gustatory assertion at a context of assessment iff the assertion is accurate relative to the tastes of that context.

<sup>17</sup>This is not to say that the contextualist/relativist could not allow that the assertions are inaccurate though warranted in a more ordinary sense. The point here is only that, if we are searching for *some* notion of warrant that is supposed to differentiate contextualism/relativism from objectivism, and we are coming up short, we may have to appeal to some *unordinary* sense of warrant.

seems to point away from objectivism. In the previous section we saw that objectivism will, barring independent barriers, go ahead and allow that likes and experiences of enjoyment give us some kind of “ease” of warrant. We saw a subjectivist claiming that nevertheless the objectivist could not allow the ease that comes with warrant that derives from accessing (easily accessible) features that partially constitute something’s deliciousness (i.e., according to the subjectivists, our tastes). The objectivist admits this, but asks why we should focus only on that warrant, independently of just thinking that subjectivism must be true. One response is to suggest that we look to facts about how we *evaluate* other people’s assertion. If we evaluated assertions as “warranted” because we evaluate them as *true* relative to the asserter’s taste, then we should think that assertions are easily warranted, not just in the sense that tastes can indicate to us that something is delicious, but in the sense that those tastes partially make it true that something is delicious. The problem is that this is not the way the evaluation of taste assertions really seems to go. We do not evaluate those clashing assertions as correct; we do not “allow” them despite disagreeing with them. In fact, we think their assertions are inaccurate; we demand that they be retracted given that they are inaccurate; and we ourselves would retract any such inaccurate assertions we made previously. On this score, a certain kind of subjectivist (or seeming subjectivist—more on this below)—the relativist—actually agrees with the objectivist.

Are we not being too quick? Look again at why the relativist would predict retraction for the incorrect assertion that the asserter made at the initial context of use. According to the relativist, this assertion is still incorrect only *relative to the evaluator’s tastes at his context of assessment*.<sup>18</sup> This is supposed to add something more than the objectivist’s just saying that it is a claim that is inaccurate, *period*. Whether it does is what I want to take up next.

## 4.5 Making *and* Evaluating Taste Assertions (Differentiating Relativism from Objectivism)

Relativism, despite its differences from contextualism, still attempts to relativize the truth of gustatory assertions to subjective factors like tastes. But relativism also, I think, has a better understanding of the evaluation of taste assertions than the contextualist does. This pair of facts might suggest that relativism would be a better alternative to objectivism because it can respect *both* intuitions about taste assertions: an (objectivist-friendly) intuition that we evaluate them independently of the asserter’s tastes, and a (subjectivist-friendly) intuition that there is something especially easy about gaining warrant for a gustatory assertion.

But even if that is the hope, the relativist does not escape the question that occupied us earlier, on what is at stake between contextualism and objectivism. It is true that it, like

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<sup>18</sup>This is because relativism relativizes not just truth but also the accuracy/correctness of assertions, as in (MacFarlane, 2007).

contextualism, relativizes the truth of gustatory assertions to subjective factors like tastes. But it is also supposed to be true that there is a concrete phenomenon that this helps us respect better than objectivism respects it. If the phenomenon is still being thought to be that there is something especially easy about warrant for making a gustatory assertion, it is difficult to see what that amounts to, if we only look at the making or evaluating of taste assertions.

The relativist does not escape the question, but maybe he is in a better position to answer it. I considered the making of taste assertions, then I considered the evaluation of taste assertions. But perhaps we should consider both at the same time. What is distinctive about relativism is that it wants *both* that we evaluate taste assertions independently of *asserters'* tastes (though not independently of our own when evaluating); *and* that we “allow” others’ those assertions. The former we saw in the relativist’s claim that evaluators would judge that an assertion is incorrect (and so “objectively” unwarranted) and demand retraction from the mistaken asserter. The latter is not yet clear, but it seems to come with the thought that, at the same time, the assertions are still correct relative to the asserters’ contexts of assessment.<sup>19</sup> So for relativism, the question becomes the one I ended the last section with: what does relativism add by saying that our evaluator from the previous section is properly evaluating the assertion as incorrect, but it is incorrect only “relative to the tastes at the evaluator’s context of assessment?” Given that relativism and objectivism both say that the assertion should be withdrawn, given its “incorrectness,” what else is the relativist doing when he seems to want to add something that the objectivist has yet to really understand: that such “incorrectness” is still “relative to the evaluator’s tastes?”

One suggestion just returns us to our original question about the differences between subjectivism and objectivism on the making of assertion. The suggestion is that what the relativist adds by saying that the evaluator’s assessment is an assessment of inaccuracy “relative to the evaluator’s tastes” is exactly that the evaluator can easily find warrant for making the judgment that it is wrong to think that the item is delicious. The evaluator can find that warrant in his own tastes. The only difference between this ease of warrant and the ease of warrant we tried to locate earlier when discussing contextualism is that we are not discussing warrant for *asserting* that something is not delicious, but rather warrant for *evaluating* that an assertion that something is delicious is inaccurate. This does not seem to be an important difference. So once again the issue becomes one of why we should not allow the objectivist to say the same: that the evaluator can rely on his likes and experiences of enjoyment to have warrant for judging that the assertion is inaccurate, etc.

But I am not very satisfied by this suggestion, at this point. I mean it does not seem to me to really capture *all* of the motivation driving relativism. I think relativism might be trying to capture something special going on here, *beyond* what the contextualist worries about. The relativist, unlike the contextualist, wants to allow *both* that we sense the asserter

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<sup>19</sup>Notice the same back and forth infects the evaluations as well. On the one hand, we will evaluate those evaluations independently of whatever tastes those evaluators had; on the other hand, our evaluations will still be correct only relative to our own tastes.

should retract *and* that nevertheless we acknowledge a sense in which our sensing that he should retract is somehow consistent with an attitude of “allowance” towards the asserter’s claim that is sustained by this idea that it is “true relative to the asserter’s own context of assessment.” This makes the relativist’s notion of “allowance” seem odd. The contextualist’s notion of “allowance,” by contrast, can just fall out of his theory about gustatory truth: we “allow” them in the clear sense that we (both we the theoreticians and we ordinary evaluators) recognize that they are correct, period—so the contextualist predicts we would *not* force those asserters with differing tastes to retract, we would not challenge their assertions, think of them as mistaken, and so on.

Since the relativist does *not* think ordinary evaluators think that those assertions are correct in the above contextualist way, he seems to have a special worry to address: “Why should we predict that asserters should/would actually *retract* their assertions if we also think that their assertions are—in *some* sense ‘to be allowed,’ or, still ‘true relative to his own context of assessment?’” Now, the mere fact of retraction does not *entail* that what is retracted is something “not to be allowed.” So for instance, we can rightfully retract assertions—take them out of “play”—even when they were reasonable, justified, and so on. I am not trying to deny this. My point is rather that, barring independent worries about objectivism’s ability to understand ordinary gustatory justification, it seems strange to call an assertion that is ordinarily justified, “true relative to the asserter’s context of assessment,” even if it is *easily* so justified. Why call it that unless you are looking for something more special than justification?<sup>20</sup>

The seeming specialness of this attitude of allowance comes out also in considering what that attitude might be if it is to be had consistently with the way we *challenge* others’ taste assertions. If relativism and objectivism are right, we rightfully challenge an asserter’s claim when we think of it as incorrect, and we think of it as correct or incorrect independently of the tastes at the asserter’s context. But for a relativist, this is because we rightfully challenge an assertion when we evaluate it as incorrect relative to the tastes at the context of assessment of the challenge. But if we evaluate it as “incorrect” (and thus challenge it), what does it mean to insist that we still should have a certain attitude of “allowance” that is sustained by its being still “correct at the asserter’s context of assessment?”

If relativism insists on differentiating itself from objectivism only in terms of our ordinary notion of justification, we are just dealing with the question we were dealing with in the earlier section: the question of why the objectivist cannot allow that taste asserters are justified often enough to match the predictions of the subjectivist. And assuming that we have *failed*

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<sup>20</sup>Here is a slightly different worry: before we discussed whether gustatory truth is relative to anything, we already knew that some people (epistemologists, say) think that gustatory warrant must be essentially sourced in our tastes. Relativism seems to match objectivism about whether some assertion is correct independently of the asserter’s tastes; if it wants *only* to insist against the objectivist that gustatory warrant is “merely internalist,” why isn’t his position *just* one in epistemology, and not at all semantics? I think there *is* an answer to this worry: because the relativist also says that constraint on warrant is built into proper usage of “delicious.” That is an answer, but we still need to be told why this constraint should be built into the semantics, on top of just being true of gustatory warrant.



to capture anything in that realm that an objectivist cannot allow, then what we have here is just the very un-special thought that we evaluate other's assertions as incorrect (based on whether we think they are incorrect), and that nevertheless those asserters were justified in thinking what they did. This is just what we *often* think about other people's beliefs and assertions about something—that they are justified but nevertheless incorrect. But then, if we do not want relativism to just be the same as objectivism, it seems to me that we should think of relativism as attempt to capture the idea that there *is* something special going on here.

So I will assume that is what relativism is trying to do. Let us call the relativist's (seemingly) special combination of commitments the “simultaneous criticism and allowance” that characterizes relativism's attitude towards taste assertions. Sometimes, just to emphasize that we still need to make sense of it, I will deem it “schizophrenic.” In the next section, I want to try to give an example of something that might give more concrete sense to such “allowance,” or such a combination of commitments. I hope the example can be given independently of brute intuitions about what sort of “justification” we should really be looking at here *and* independently of the kind of disagreement-based worry I considered in Chapter 3. I am in the end not sure we can make the example out in such a way, but I think it is worth trying.

Before I do that, I want to make more explicit note of one special problem that relativism faces, not in virtue of its semantics alone, but in virtue of its semantics being used to account for its special combination of commitments. If we do not come up with some clear, concrete phenomenon that captures simultaneous criticism and allowance—whether we find the phenomenon in considerations about testimony, about disagreement, or about the making, evaluation or challenging of taste assertions—then relativism begins to look awfully like objectivism. This is not a unique worry since it is the same kind of worry discussed in the earlier section above: whether there is anything that points to contextualism over objectivism on the matter of warrant for taste assertions. But it is a special worry for relativism because of the radical nature of its theoretical commitment to the notion of ‘relative truth.’ The worry here results not just in the possibility that our evidence seems to underdetermine which of relativism or objectivism is correct.<sup>21</sup> The worry is the one emphasized in (MacFarlane, 2005, draft): that relative truth does not make sense. This would be so if relativism would make just the very same difference to our gustatory practices, broadly construed, as objectivism would.<sup>22</sup> So it is urgent that this form of subjectivism—if it really is one—says more about where it wants to take a stand against objectivism (while still being a view about gustatory truth).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>For the question of evidence, see (Wright, 2007).

<sup>22</sup>However, if relativism is really meant to capture the thought that gustatory warrant is much “easier” than objectivism thinks it is, then perhaps the real danger is that relativism makes just the very same difference to our gustatory practices as an epistemological view about the ease of gustatory warrant does. The danger then is that it has not made out why its notion of relative truth is a notion of *truth*.

<sup>23</sup>This is reminiscent of the famous problem that so-called “quasi-realism” faces: that of allowing for so much of realist talk that it is hard to see what there is to be “quasi” about. For this general worry,

## 4.6 “Superhard” Cases: Parity, Sort Of?

Setting aside the general worry about the sense of relativism, let us try to give the mish-mash of intuitions above—about making, evaluating, challenging assertions—a phenomenon; that is, an example. The example will have us worrying not so much about disagreeing with another person about a gustatory matter, or taking (or at least taking seriously) another person’s word on a gustatory matter; nor does it seem to start from theoretically-loaded considerations about what gustatory justification must look like; but rather it concerns one’s not “being able” to adopt a seemingly good gustatory sensibility as one’s own, though one finds it “on a par” with one’s own. If it can be made out, it would be an example, I think, of when we feel that we want to say that there’s “something to” the sensibility we “cannot” take up—that “it has value”—but that nevertheless it is not “for me” (though it may very well be “for another”). This sounds schizophrenic enough to count as something that might drive us to think that truth is relativized to our gustatory sensibilities.

Return to my talk of “pluralistic gustatory values” in Chapter 3. In some cases, I think it is clear enough that what we are dealing with are merely equally good-tasting things: a great version of an apple and a great version of a pear; or peanut butter and jam and peanut butter and chocolate. In such cases, there is no schizophrenia associated with our assertions that such things are (more or less) delicious or our evaluations of others’ assertions about these things. You might not be able to decide which one you feel like having right now, but this is not because you have difficulty deciding which one is gustatorily better; both are good, and to an equal amount, so unless you want to starve, you will eventually just plump for one or the other. But some cases are not quite like this. They are cases where one wants to say that the items are “differently good” but not one “better” than the other. These cases belong in the realm of what philosophers of value have called “incommensurable values,” or, when speaking of the bearers of those values, “incomparable goods.”<sup>24</sup> Realistic

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see (Dworkin, 1996). If the parallel is right, a relativist may also want to take quasi-realist strategies for saving the distinctiveness of its view. He may, for instance, give up the idea that the sense of his central notion is tied *only* to what MacFarlane has called “practical significance.” Perhaps he could appeal to, in addition, something like “explanatory significance.” Quasi-realists have sometimes said that, even if they give the same results as realists at the level of practice, they explain them in a special way that realists do not. For a survey (and synthesis) of this way of giving sense and significance to quasi-realism, see (Dreier, 2004).

<sup>24</sup>Some philosophers think such cases are just cases of vagueness; others think they are cases where there is no sense to the items expressing the values being rationally compared; some think that they can be compared, just not via the “trichotomy” of comparison relations of better-or-worse-than, and equally-good. I will be assuming that at the very least, this is a real phenomenon that deserves explanation. I tend to think of the relevant goods as “substantively incomparable,” where even if one can find a “common measure” along which to compare them, it will not be a substantive one and will still result in a combination of attitudes that suggests that the goods are differently good and not one better than the other (and not just equally good). Some think of this as the items being “on a par” (as in (Chang, 2002)); I do not resist that thought. The question of whether choices between the items (as either brute choices/plumping for one option or as choices based on the judgment that the items are “on a par”) are *rational* and in what sense is the question I think most important for the issue at hand. For an argument that the practical-rational upshot of things being, in

cases of this possibility in the arena of gustatory judgment seem “schizophrenic” enough to make us wonder whether some subtle form of subjectivism or relativism will best account for those judgments.

To make them out most clearly, it is easier, I think, to focus on broader gustatory sensibilities. We can think more realistically of “sensibilities” by thinking of them not just abstractly as standards for judging something delicious, but as standards that we might actually say we express in making/having a variety of gustatory judgments/attitudes, or doing certain things on the basis of those attitudes. So, much like I might be said to express certain philosophical sensibilities when I avoid overly-technical philosophical issues and when I spend an inordinate amount of time worrying if something rings true instead of whether it just is true, and so on, I might be said to express certain gustatory sensibilities when I am adventurous about trying new things, when I treat very delicate foods with a slight disdain, when I go in for earthy food that warms the soul and tastes of the cook’s passion instead of his creativity, and so on.

Now consider a different gustatory sensibility that might be “expressed” by someone. Suppose you are gustatorily “conservative”—you do not often go about trying new things, and you hew to delicate and refined foods. You go in for what is sometimes called the “luxuriousness” of food. If you ever are adventuresome or “progressive” about food, you are so by pursuing avant-garde haute cuisine that does not just comfort your palate, but toys and plays with it, winks at it, and so on.<sup>25</sup> Just like there can be a certain kind of clash between living a good intellectual life and leading a good family life, there is a clash here between different sorts of “gustatory lives,” structured around (preferences for, interests in, and pursuits of) different sets of gustatory goods or foods/drinks exemplifying those goods.

People with these differing sensibilities may come out with gustatory judgments that (seem to) clash. One person oohs and aahs over the latest molecular gastronomy restaurant in the city; the other person oohs and aahs over the Caribbean roti storefront run single-handedly by a Jamaican mother. Each pooh poohs the other’s laudatory judgments. One wonders, “What’s so great about all the little slivers of one knows not what, and the foams and pastes and towers?” The other, “What’s so great about such a homely, crude, in-your-face thing?” These examples are often ones where what seems to be at issue is the “proper” kind of balance or “correct” comparison of relatively general sorts of values that are relevant to gustatory goodness.<sup>26</sup> By this, I do not mean just balance of flavors in a dish; that is just required for a dish to be good (except in cases where dishes are good exactly because they burst with some particular aspect of flavor). I mean balance in gustatory values that food items might exhibit or exemplify—for instance, the balance between innovation and surprise, and simplicity and purity/integrity of ingredient.

*Or*—and this is the issue—perhaps we are just as likely to not quite criticize each other’s judgments. He scrunches his face up at my choices, shakes his head and shrugs his shoulders,

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Chang’s sense, “on the par” versus their being simply “incomparable” is in fact the same, see (Boot, 2009).

<sup>25</sup>If it helps: this is like comparing a diner who enthusiastically follows the Michelin Guide to structure his gustatory life and the diner who is instead a fervent fan of the reviews of Jonathan Gold.

<sup>26</sup>Again, what is essential here is not that there is a dispute.

but he may very well say, “Well, you see food in a certain kind of way. That is one way, I suppose. It works for you; but that is just not for me.”

We can also describe the examples without resort to the technique of speaking of different people disputing or criticizing (or not criticizing) each other.<sup>27</sup> For instance: sometimes I can think of some cuisine that I do not really go in for—that I do not pursue, do not particularly like, and so on—as something that I realize and even positively insist is good/valuable. I claim that I *know* it’s good, for instance. And yet I feel I am not doing *anything* wrong by not going in for it. In fact, I may also feel that it is not as if I simply have *no good reasons* to not go in for it; I may rehearse those reasons wondering why I think nevertheless that there is something valuable there that I do not like.<sup>28</sup> The above are the kinds of examples I think we should examine if we are to come up with something where we sway back and forth between “criticism” and “allowance.”

In these cases, which Chang (2002) calls “superhard” cases, it can seem as if all we have here is a mere plurality of gustatory goods and that there is no sense to thinking that one is just better than the other.<sup>29</sup> Also, the plurality of the goods is such that one item (or one kind of balance) exhibits one good to the detriment of the other—let’s say, for example, that the simplicity of ingredient in one cannot be present in something with that kind of surprise or refinement because the latter requires complexity.<sup>30</sup> However, things are not as simple as coming to see that two foods (or two broader collections of foods) exemplify a gustatory good in equal amounts, in the way that peanut butter and chocolate and peanut butter and caramel might exemplify in equal amount the goodness of the delights of a nutty, sticky, savory-sweet treat. In the latter case, it is clear what is being said to be a good, and it is clear we have two things that equally exemplify it in different ways that do not matter to what is good. In our cases, this does not seem to be so.<sup>31</sup> The inventiveness and refinement

<sup>27</sup>Remember we are not supposed to be dealing with the same motivation as the one presented in Chapter 3 about taste disagreement.

<sup>28</sup>These sorts of cases are related to the cases we discuss under the heading Resistance to gustatory testimony, since the way we “know” something is good though we do not “go in” for it is often via other peoples’ testimony. But this need not be so. I may recognize—for myself—that some cuisine is good, valuable, and so on, and still feel I am not in the wrong to go to develop a taste for it, and so on.

<sup>29</sup>In the literature on “parity” and value pluralism, people often talk of choosing (or if this is a better term, “picking”). They talk about the difficulty of choosing lives or choosing goods, and the difficulty of doing so rationally, or on the basis of reason’s demands or permissions. I do not primarily speak in terms of choosing, but the issues here are the same, I think, because philosophers here speak of choosing one item over another because they are concerned about how the choosing is being done on the basis of our best judgments as to what is worth choosing—for us, what is gustatorily good.

<sup>30</sup>Chang’s example is one in which we compare Mozart and Michelangelo and we recognize that one is better than the other with respect to one kind of good/value, the other better with respect to a different kind of good/value, and it is “superhard” to compare them along the dimension of creativity. (Two differing goods/values are ones that fulfill the more general one of creativity.)

<sup>31</sup>As is often suggested (e.g., in what Chang (2002) calls the “Small Improvement Argument”), a little bit of increase/decrease in the fulfillment of one of the values would not suddenly make the comparison easy—we would not suddenly think that one of the items is better/worse—which suggests we are not dealing with the equally good. (See also (Raz, 1986).)

Chang also has an argument for thinking the cases must be “comparable.” I do not deal with it here

of avant-garde cuisine seems just wildly different than the simple integrity of ingredient in California cuisine.

But are the cases then ones in which things are simply incomparable, like when we “compare” the gustatory goodness of a desk with macaroni and cheese, where there seems to be no *issue* of something’s gustatory goodness or betterness (or equality)? Not according to Chang. In defending the idea that her “superhard” cases are ones that are not reducible to vagueness between, say, “better/worse than” and “equally good,” she says that, if we were to draw a continuum between the two seemingly incomparable items and pick a “cut-off” line, different picks of such a line would not be a “clash of arbitrary decisions but a substantive disagreement in which arguments can be brought to bear.” There is, she says, a “resolutorial remainder; given a list of admissible ways in which the perplexity might be resolved, there is still a further question as to how the perplexity is to be resolved, for that resolution is not simply given by arbitrarily opting for one admissible resolution over another.” (Chang, 2002, p. 685) This is what I meant to suggest when I suggested that we might very well, in these cases, criticize a choosing of one item over the item, or rather, one gustatory life over another.<sup>32</sup> Finally, it just seems like such evaluations and comparisons do not completely “misfire”—they are not evaluations of things that are simply so different that it makes no sense to compare them at all. After all, as we might say, the values exemplified are both relevant to *overall gustatory goodness*. This is part of why it seems like “resolving” the “perplexity” in such a case would admit of argument—the argument is about how or whether each item contributes to gustatory goodness.

We can put this combination of characteristics in a way closer to the vocabulary earlier in this chapter. While we are going about judging and choosing, it looks like we are just judging what is in fact delicious (or more delicious), and that we are choosing on the basis of such judgments. We seem to criticize judgments or choices that we would not go in for. This is why we might go about challenging others who judge or choose otherwise. This is also why we would go about retracting previous decisions that we now see as incorrectly based on judgments we would now not make (as shown by the fact that we would retract any previous conflicting assertions we made expressing such judgments). However, at the same time, it is difficult to see how, for our superhard cases, one item/value is just better than the other. It is difficult to see how we could *rationally* plump for one rather than another of the items (or one rather than another balance of the values in a single item), in judgment or in choice. This seems to make for a difficulty for objectivism. The former characteristics—about evaluation and criticism, retraction and challenge—are perfectly sensible for an objectivist, but the latter seem not to be, especially not at the same time. It can seem as if, for an objectivist, if the latter is true, then the former are just things we do irrationally—with no basis in reason,

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because my interest is in the practical upshot of her “fourth” comparative relation of being “on-a-par.” (See note 37.)

<sup>32</sup>Such seeming criticisms *need* not explicitly reference one’s tastes: “That stuff is too overwrought and bound up with irrelevant things, like shocking the diner or trying to just be aesthetically pleasing—where does it respect the integrity of ingredients, turning it into abstract geometric shapes and other silly little food-toys?”

which does *not* in fact demand that we go in for one rather than the other of the items, and so does not seem to allow us to criticizing the items we do not go in for, etc. If the superhard cases are genuine, concrete cases, then, perhaps the proper way to understand them is in terms of some form of subjectivism. Here is a basic reason why: perhaps what is going on in these cases is that, on the one hand, we recognize that, independently of our own “tastes” (or broader gustatory sensibilities), there is something “on a par” about the items (or sets of items, or lives, or whatever) we are evaluating/comparing; but on the other hand, we also use those gustatory sensibilities to criticize that item we would not go in for, and we are neither mistaken nor unjustified in doing so exactly because reason to think something is gustatorily good or bad is essentially dependent on those tastes, and this because tastes partially constitute goodness.<sup>33</sup> If this preliminary line of thought is based on real cases/intuitions, then at the very least we may see what we have to make sense of—the phenomenon of superhard cases—to make sense of a special notion of warrant objectivism cannot allow.

Notice finally that the examples appeal to intuitions that seem to be just of the kind the subjectivist was looking for: something pretty “directly” about the making and evaluating of taste assertions, or even just directly of the judgments themselves. Of course, it is hard to determine whether some intuitions are based just on one’s theoretical proclivities, and when they are based on one’s competence with ordinary concepts and familiarity with ordinary gustatory practice. All I can do here is report that I think there is something to these “superhard” cases, intuitively, just as I thought earlier there is something to the sense that we resist gustatory testimony, and the sense of “nonchalance” associated with disputing about matters of taste.

I think it is promising to pursue the connection between relativism and seemingly incommensurable, incomparable, or on-a-par goods/values. But I do not think there is any kind of knock-down case for or against subjectivism or objectivism here. The objectivist should, in the face of the examples above, remember to keep in mind three points that should help him defend his position. First, the superhard cases are thought of as superhard because we know there are easier ones. This is unlike what we saw with the issues surrounding testimony and taste disagreement (as well as the various analogies I had the subjectivist pursue in Chapter 1). When it came to those issues, the phenomena discussed were (or were supposed to be) widespread: we Resist gustatory testimony, and we exhibit Ease and Allowance in or in face of taste disputes, in general. It is not likewise initially plausible that, in general, cases of judgment and comparison of gustatory goodness are superhard.<sup>34</sup>

Second, it is not unreasonable to deny one side or another of the supposed superhard cases.<sup>35</sup> The objectivist can, case by superhard case, discount the case as one where the choices/judgments are in fact equally rational permissible, in which case any argument we engage in, in choosing the items/values or in making comparative judgments, are arguments

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<sup>33</sup>I have eliminated the differences between contextualism and relativism in this description.

<sup>34</sup>This should not give the objectivist *a lot* of comfort, but a little bit.

<sup>35</sup>This is parallel to someone denying one side or the other of the supposed phenomenon of “faultless disagreement.”

that are properly directed *only* to the conclusion that reason is *indifferent* between the two items/values. In this way, for instance, when Chang claims that “arguments can be brought to bear,” she should mean only that there are substantive arguments between someone who thinks the items are “on a par” and someone who insists one is better than the other. In *that* argument, the latter person is just wrong, and there is no sense to properly criticizing one item *rather than* the other as rationally the one to “go in for.”<sup>36</sup>

Or the objectivist can discount the case as one in which it is proper to criticize one item or the other as worse, and *thus* not ones where going in for one or the other is equally rational permissible. The proponents of these superhard cases may object that this flattens the distinction between the “equally good” and the “on a par.” For only when the former relation holds, they may insist, is it really proper to think that going for one or the other item is *just* equally rational permissible. Items being “on a par” have somewhat different rational-practical implications—exactly ones on which we can *also* criticize, even though they are on a par.<sup>37</sup>

This last insistence actually sounds question-begging to me. But let it bring us to the third point. The objectivist can also attempt to *diagnose* what is going on with our intuitions in these supposed superhard cases by claiming that there is a tempting confusion here between the idea that certain values or goods are not “commensurable” and the idea that they are “rationally comparable,” but only in a special way. Just because certain goods or values, when compared, cannot be compared via a common measure (understood independently of the bare dimension of comparison—what Chang calls a “covering consideration” for a comparison—e.g., deliciousness/overall gustatory goodness) does not mean that they are comparable only via some special comparative relation, e.g., being “on a par,” where

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<sup>36</sup>Again, Chang is discussing a situation where one chooses to put a pair of cases (Mozart and Michelangelo compared on creativity) in the “better than” side or in the “not better than” side because she is arguing against the idea that there is just vagueness in the comparative “better than.” She claims there is a “resolutive remainder” when one so sorts the pair of Mozart and Michelangelo. The arguments that would be brought to bear in that remainder are arguments for or against the pair being on the “better than” side, or on the “not better than” side. But the latter side includes both “the other is the one that is better” and “they are equally good.” So it is actually somewhat unclear whether Chang is suggesting that we are ever bringing to bear arguments as to *which of* Mozart or Michelangelo is better, though when she discusses the same thought experiment with “morally better than,” she does slip into: “the resolution of this superhard case cannot be a matter of arbitrary stipulation but is a substantive matter concerning *which is better*.” (p. 685 Chang, 2002, my italics)

<sup>37</sup>Chang (2005) deals with the question of the “practical upshot” of things being “on a par.” She admits that being on a par, like being equally good (and being completely incomparable), makes it rationally permissible to go in for either item. She thinks that beyond this, things “on a par” have practical upshots for the choice as it relates to other choices, especially in the context of situations where there is a danger of a “value pump”—one where because of the rational permissibility between various pairwise on-a-par choices, one ends up rationally choosing something that is clearly worse off than what one started with, a danger that is not present with equally-good choices. Things on a par, Chang claims, puts constraints on what other choices we can make because we need to avoid such value pumps. For an argument against this attempt to distinguish “on a par” from other relations, see (Boot, 2009). As far as I can tell, even if Chang were right, the practical upshot would not be one that marked the difference between subjectivism and objectivism (not that this difference is anything she is concerned with in her arguments).

that is understood as having a different upshot than being “equally good.” This gap opens up the possibility for the following kind of objectivist diagnosis of what sense is being felt that drives us to posit some special relation (and some special rational upshot) here: when we realize that we have nothing other than some prior conception of how to adjudicate what counts as, say, gustatorily good—when, that is, we do not have a measure understandable in terms other than “what is gustatorily good, overall”—then when we are faced with a difficult (an epistemically difficult) case in which we have to “weigh up” or “compare” very different values/goods that are relevant to or are kinds of gustatory goodness/goods, we have nothing like an *independent guide* to consult when we judge or choose. Since we do not have an independent guide, it is very tempting to think that any judgment or choice we make is hence in *some way* arbitrary. We think this “arbitrariness” must make the case one where it is in fact rationally permissible to go either way, even though, at the same time, because we still operate with a conception of what is gustatorily good (overall), we still think we should go in for one way rather than another and we employ arguments suggesting so. Hence the seeming schizophrenia.

Obviously this is but the barest sketch of a diagnosis, but one can still see, I think, its intuitive force, especially when we compare it to the diagnosis in Chapter 3 about taste disputes. There we have the tendency to move from the fact that we cannot help but question-beg against others—or, as we might say, we cannot help but rely on standards that are not *independent* of a dispute—to the idea that there must be something *epistemically* arbitrary or anyway “less strict” going on. This idea manifests itself in the suggestion that gustatory reasons must be dependent on tastes. In this chapter, we see a very similar tendency, even if it is not operating in the context of actual dialectical disputes: the tendency is to move from the fact that (in some cases) we have no independent guide to the idea that there is something epistemically arbitrary or less strict. This idea manifests itself in the suggestion that there is a special form of rational permissibility present in such cases (present, that is, even when it is right to criticize).

## 4.7 Conclusion

Obviously the last section is incomplete and too sketchy. But with it, I meant only to show the direction that I would next take this investigation into our gustatory practices. Throughout these chapters, I have written as if I just want to defend objectivism, period. But in fact, I was driven to do this only because I think there is something very deep about, if not subjectivism itself, at least the relativistic form of subjectivism that I have been trying to address in this chapter. I have thus ended the dissertation with an attempt to say why we should take relativism very seriously, even though I have tried my best to criticize its subjectivism throughout these chapters. The reason I think we should take it seriously is that, even independently of the typical “phenomena” used to show objectivism “must be wrong”—bare cases of “genuine” taste disagreement, difficult-to-resolve taste disputes, resistance to taste testimony—we do detect in some areas of discourse, the gustatory one



included, something strange: at the very least a wavering back and forth that is difficult for a “straight” objectivist to understand as anything other than confused. I have tried in this dissertation to argue against the knee-jerk reaction to the idea that matters of taste might be just straightforwardly objective: “Of course not!” I think it is equally wrong to have a knee-jerk reaction to hardcore truth relativism: “That just doesn’t make sense!” or “I don’t even know what you mean!”

Let me summarize. To exaggerate: matters of taste are not “mere matters of taste.” To put it more cautiously: matters of taste are not obviously subjective, in light of extended investigation into how we think and talk about matters of taste. In particular, we acquire tastes on the basis of reasons that seem to be our access to deliciousness, independently of our tastes, interests or purposes; we resist gustatory testimony, but quite possibly only because we value forming gustatory identities with our own tastes; we are nonchalant about disputing with others about matter of taste, but not irrationally so and not because reasons in this realm must be sourced just in our own tastes; and in some hard cases, we waver back and forth between thinking either of two conflicting judgments or choices are permissible, and thinking some one of them is right or better, but we may do so only because the cases are hard, or only because we are not operating with an “independent guide” and that makes us worry that we are being arbitrary. For the objectivist, these are at *worst* mixed results.

Barring independent theoretical or metaphysical (or maybe scientific?) reasons to think otherwise, so far I would tentatively conclude that we do not know if gustatory matters are subjective, but there is nevertheless decent reason to think reasons for thinking they are subjective are misguided, and in that negative sense, decent reason to think objectivism is correct. I would obviously also counsel further investigation. Furthermore, I would remind us that, even if we find those supposed theoretical or metaphysical reasons to think matters of taste are this or that way, we still have to understand whether such a way requires us to deny what we ordinarily think (and talk and act as if is so), and that may not be an easy thing to understand. Finally, even if we can see that the way we ordinarily think is misguided, we are still left with the difficult question of how we could coherently go about revising our thought and talk.

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