Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/sinq20

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To cite this article: Chris Barker (2013): Negotiating Taste, Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy, 56:2-3, 240-257

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2013.784482

Inquiry, 2013
Vol. 56, Nos. 2–3, 240–257, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2013.784482

Negotiating Taste

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(Received 30 November 2012)

ABSTRACT *Using a vague predicate can make commitments about the appropriate use of that predicate in the remaining part of the discourse. For instance, if I assert that some particular pig is fat, I am committed to judging any fatter pig to be fat as well. We can model this update effect by recognizing that truth depends both on the state of the world and on the state of the discourse: the truth conditions of 'This pig is fat' rule out evaluation points <w, d> for which the pig in question in world w is thinner than the cutoff for fatness in the discourse d. Then disagreements about taste ('This chili is tasty'; 'No it's not!') are disagreements about the discourse. Unlike disagreements about the world, disagreements about the discourse can be faultless, given that none of the discourse participants has privileged authority to make pronouncements about conventions for appropriate use of a predicate. Thus on the dynamic view developed here, whether or not a dispute about taste turns out to be faultless depends in part on predictable features of the previous discourse. On this account, faultless disagreement involving predicates of personal taste does not force relativizing truth to a judge or assessor.*

I. Introduction

This paper explores what taking a dynamic view on the update effect of asserting a vague predicate has to say about certain kinds of faultless disagreement.

Predicates of personal taste ('This chili is tasty') can give rise to faultless disagreement ('No it's not!'), suggesting that truth may sometimes be relative to a context of assessment.[1] Taking a dynamic view, I suggest that, like all positive assertions of gradable adjectives, assertions of predicates of personal taste constrain vague standards. And, like all such assertions, they can be used in a variety of ways: to move regions of borderline degrees into the positive

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[1] Lasersohn, 'Context Dependence'.

or negative extension of a predicate,[2] to inform discourse participants about the prevailing standards,[3] to assert a norm,[4] or even to negotiate which micro-language we are using to communicate.[5]

If disagreements about taste are disagreements about the discourse we are engaged in, there is no need to relativize truth to a judge or assessor; if so, then predicates of personal taste do not force us to accept relativism.

Barker develops a general framework for modeling the update effect of the use of vague predicates.[6] I intend for the proposal here to be a straightforward application of that framework to predicates of personal taste, along lines sketched in another of Barker's studies.[7] Sassoon develops a similar proposal.[8] However, on her account, expressions are able to manipulate certain aspects of the context directly. I am skeptical that expressions should be allowed to do this; nevertheless, despite these and other differences, I count Sassoon's view as closely kindred in its essential insights and in its spirit.

II. Faultless Disagreement as Disagreement about the Discourse

Predicates of personal taste such as *tasty* or *fun* exhibit a particularly vivid sort of faultless disagreement.[9] When one person asserts 'This chili is tasty', and another person replies 'This chili is not tasty', they disagree: it would be incoherent to assent to both statements at the same time. Yet there does not seem to be any objective fact of the matter; in any case, there certainly is no obvious way to settle the dispute one way or the other.

But faultless disagreement is a general feature of the use of vague gradable adjectives. Indeed, Wright suggests that 'a statement's possessing (one kind of) vagueness just consists in the fact that, under certain circumstances, cognitively lucid, fully informed and properly functioning subjects may faultlessly differ about it'.[10] Then disagreeing about taste may be a special case of disagreeing about the applicability of a vague predicate.

Taking a dynamic approach, we can say a bit more: disagreements about vague predicates constitute a failure to negotiate vague standards. On this view, negotiating standards is a normal, typically automatic, part of ordinary discourse. For instance, Shapiro expresses a view similar to Wright's, except that he pays explicit attention to the time course of a discourse:

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[2]Kyburg and Morreau, 'Fitting Words'; Shapiro, *Vagueness in Context*.

[3]Barker, 'Dynamics of Vagueness'.

[4]Sundell, 'Disagreements about Taste'.

[5]Lassiter, 'Vagueness as Probabilistic Linguistic Knowledge'; Ludlow, *Living Words*.

[6]Barker, 'Dynamics of Vagueness'.

[7]Barker, 'Clarity', 270.

[8]Sassoon, 'Restricted Quantification Over Tastes'.

[9]Kölbel, 'Faultless Disagreement'; Lasersohn, 'Context Dependence'.

[10]Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, 144.

> [E]xtensions (and anti-extensions) of vague terms also vary in the course of a conversation, even after the external contextual features, such as the comparison class, are fixed... a competent speaker . . . can go either way in the borderline area of a vague predicate without sinning against the meaning of the words and the non-linguistic facts.[11]

Here is how it works: at any given moment in a discourse, the discourse participants are prepared to entertain a (constrained) range of possible cutoff points for the applicability of a vague predicate. For instance, we may have some idea of how tall a person needs to be to count as tall, without having a fully precise idea. Then accepting an assertion of 'John is tall' constrains the set of viable cutoffs, since it commits a discourse participant to agreeing that anyone who is at least as tall as John must also count as tall. In addition to Shapiro, dynamic accounts of vague assertion have been developed by Kyburg and Morreau, Barker, and Sassoon.[12]

Ordinary disagreement involves incompatible beliefs about the facts in the world under discussion: 'New York is further south than Rome'; 'No it's not!' This kind of dispute can be resolved by empirical investigation, in this case, taking measurements with astrolabes.

The kind of faultless disagreement under consideration here occurs when discourse participants agree (in all relevant respects) on facts about the world, but maintain incompatible assumptions about the range of viable cutoffs for some vague predicate.

The limits on flexible use of vague predicates depend in part on the conventions for use of a vague predicate in the relevant speech community. We are sure that some people definitely count as tall, and that some others definitely do not count as tall. For the remaining people, there is no mutually agreed way to classify them. Since no individual has privileged access to or authority over linguistic convention, there is no recourse for disputes over vague standards. It is this lack of authority that accounts for the impression of faultlessness.

This results in a picture on which at least some kinds of faultless disagreement can be handled in a purely contextualist approach, with no need to resort to relativism. That is, Lasersohn argues that faultless disagreement requires truth to be relativized to a judge (an assessor).[13] Then 'This chili is tasty' may be true relative to me, but false relative to you. Given any fixed choice of judge, the claims are contradictory, but when judges differ, the claims are perfectly compatible. The price to pay for Lasersohn's relativist explanation is that the truth of an assertion depends not only on the context of utterance and the circumstance of evaluation, but also on the context of assessment.

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[11] Shapiro, *Vagueness in Context*, vi.

[12] Shapiro, *Vagueness in Context*; Kyburg and Morreau, 'Fitting Words'; Barker, 'Dynamics of Vagueness'; Sassoon, 'Restricted Quantification Over Tastes'.

[13] Lasersohn, 'Context Dependence'.

III. Modeling Worlds and Discourses

On the dynamic picture here, contents are not evaluated at simple worlds, but rather at pairs $<w, d>$ consisting of a world w and a discourse d. Thus the context set simultaneously tracks uncertainty and indeterminacy about the world (reflected in the ways in which the worlds in the context set differ), and also uncertainty and indeterminacy about the discourse (reflected in the ways in which the discourses in the context set differ). To the extent that facts about the discourse are determined by the context of utterance, truth depends on context, but not on the selection of a judge.

Similarly, just as exchange of information during conversation can reduce uncertainty about the world, so too can conversation reduce uncertainty about the vague standards. More concretely, the contribution to truth conditions of a gradable adjective will depend on both coordinates:

(1) $[\![\textit{John is tall}]\!]^{<w, d>} = \mathbf{height}_w\ (\mathbf{j}) > \mathbf{s}_d\ (\textit{tall})$

The sentence 'John is tall' will be true at an evaluation point $<w, d>$ just in case John's maximal degree of height in world w exceeds the standard for tallness in discourse d. Then updating a context set with the content of 'John is tall' will eliminate those evaluation points in the context set that fail to satisfy the truth conditions in (1).

It is crucial for the explanation of faultless disagreement to distinguish among several different ways of using a vague predicate according to the update effect it has on the context. The first such use will be one in which the entire effect of the utterance is to inform about facts in the world.

(2) Q. 'I've never met John. What's he like?'
A. 'John is tall.'

Figure 1 shows the state of the mutual knowledge of a set of interlocutors before and after update with a simple assertion of a vague predicate. Each

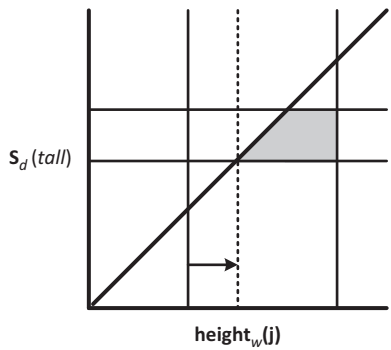

Figure 1. Ascription of a vague predicate used to update information about the world.

point on this diagram corresponds to an evaluation pair $<w, d>$ for which the horizontal axis gives John's maximal degree of height in world w, and the vertical axis gives the cutoff for tallness in discourse d.

In the scenario as depicted, there is uncertainty about the maximal degree of John's height, which as far as we mutually know may be anywhere in the range of heights between the two solid vertical lines. There is also uncertainty about how tall it is necessary to be in order to count as tall: as far as we mutually know, any of the cutoffs between the two horizontal lines are equally appropriate.

After (2) has been uttered and accepted, we can revise the picture of our mutual knowledge. If John is tall, only those evaluation points at which John's maximal degree of height exceeds the standard at that point survive update. That is, only those points underneath the 45-degree line survive update (the shaded region). The lower bound on our mutual knowledge of John's height will move rightward to the location of the dashed line, as shown by the arrow, in order for the common ground to reflect the information that John is at least as tall as he needs to be to exceed the relevant standard of tallness. Note that we have learned nothing about the standards for tallness: the surviving evaluation points still encompass the full range of possible standards we were considering before the utterance.

The second type of use to consider is one whose entire effect is to inform about prevailing standards.

(3) Q. 'I'm new around here. What counts as tall?'
A. [pointing] 'John is tall.'

This time, we have fairly precise agreement on John's height. John is standing right before us. Perhaps we are in a convenience store, and John is standing next to the height scale built into the doorways of such stores. Some uncertainty remains, that is, the vertical lines are still some distance apart: John is not standing perfectly straight, we are not looking at the scale quite straight on. There may be considerably more uncertainty about the prevailing standards for tallness. After update with the discourse in (3), however, we are able to lower the top horizontal line, as shown by the arrow (see Figure 2): we can discard any standard for tallness for which John fails to count as tall. We have learned nothing about the facts in the world, but we have made our notion of tallness more precise. This scenario is a core case addressed by Barker.[14]

Typically, perhaps normally, update with a positive use of a vague predicate will simultaneously reduce uncertainty both about the facts in the world, and about the prevailing standards.

(4) Q. 'Tell me something I don't know.'
A. 'John is tall.'

[14] Barker, 'Dynamics of Vagueness'.

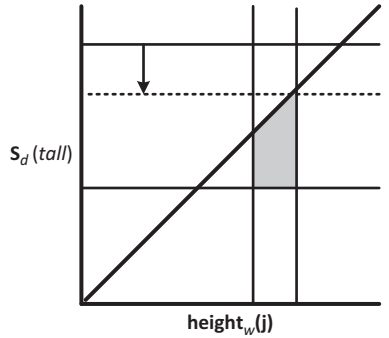

Figure 2. A vague predicate used to update information about the discourse.

We simultaneously eliminate evaluation points that contain worlds in which John is too short, and we eliminate evaluation points in which the tallness standard is too high for John to count as tall. That is, we learn that whatever John's height, the standard for tallness cannot be any higher than that.

This is the essential part of the account. Before applying it to predicates of personal taste, I briefly discuss three technical points.

First, it is well-known that there is a separate coordinate affecting judgments for predicates like *tall* called the comparison class. That is, John can be tall for a professor without being tall for a basketball player, so we have to relativize vague cutoffs to a choice of comparison class. I take it as well established (e.g., as in the quotation from Shapiro above[15]) that all of the problems of vagueness and all of the problems of faultless disagreement remain even if we fix the comparison class; in any case, I will continue to ignore comparison classes in this paper.

Second, it is convenient but simplistic to imagine a cutoff point above which all people are tall. For other predicates, a single cutoff value will not be enough. Lewis gives *green* as an example, since a color must be sufficiently un-yellow and sufficiently un-blue in order to count as green.[16] In full generality, a discourse will need to deliver a class of degrees such that any individual who has the property to a degree in that class will be a member of the positive extension of the predicate. This will not change the update semantics in any relevant way, so I will continue to assume that the set of tallness degrees delivered by the delineation function for a linear predicate like *tall* can be summarized by giving just its lower bound.

Third, it is not obvious that worlds and discourses can vary independently, which is what is suggested by listing them as separate members of an

[15]Shapiro, *Vagueness in Context*, vi.

[16]Lewis, 'General Semantics'.

ordered pair. After all, discourses are parts of worlds, so that if a world settles every proposition, it will settle propositions about any discourse it contains. Similarly, changing facts about a discourse changes the world in which the discourse is taking place. This means that it might be possible to use simple worlds as the circumstance of evaluation, in the normal Kaplanian way, and then have vague standards depend on the part of those worlds in which the discourse is taking place. Barker adopts this strategy, for instance.[17]

I am not sure this is a sound move, given that natural language appears to treat variation in worlds systematically differently than variation in discourses. For instance, it is possible for conditionals to depend on counterfactual worlds, but not on counterfactual discourses. That is, in 'If we were not having this conversation, you would (still) be tall', the consequent must be evaluated with respect to a world-discourse pair $<w', d>$ such that w' is a counterfactual world in which the discourse in question is not taking place, at the same time that d remains linked to the actual conversation. But it is not necessary to resolve this issue here, since even if discourses are parts of worlds, the pair $<w, d>$ can be viewed as a world centered on a particular discourse, the one in which the expression to be evaluated occurs.

IV. Disagreements about the World

Before we consider faultless disagreement, we should first consider non-faultless disagreement.

(5) Q. 'I've never met John. What's he like?'
A. 'John is tall.'
B. 'No, John is not tall.'

There is some mutual uncertainty about vague standards (i.e., in Figure 3, the shaded region, representing the initial context set, has non-zero height), but this uncertainty is small enough to not be relevant. There is considerably more uncertainty about John's height. Because speaker Q knows nothing about John, mutual knowledge places no constraints on his height, so the context set is uninformatively wide. Speaker A has considerably less uncertainty (rightmost pair of vertical lines). As far as A's beliefs are concerned, only the evaluation points in the small box labeled 'A' are live possibilities. These beliefs are what justify A in asserting that John is tall (see Figure 3).

Speaker B also has beliefs about John's height (leftmost pair of vertical lines). As far as B's beliefs are concerned, only the evaluation points in the small box labelled 'B' are live possibilities. In none of those possibilities does John's height exceed the standard for tallness, so in none of those possibilities does John count as tall. This is what compels B to contradict A.

[17] Barker, 'Dynamics of Vagueness'.

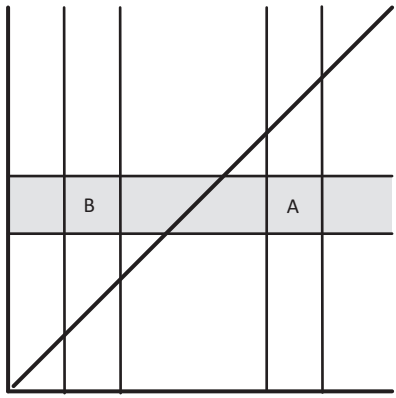

Figure 3. Disagreement about the state of the world.

Note that in this scenario, A and B agree on what the standard for tallness is. More precisely, they both consider the same range of standards as viable candidates. A's belief set and B's belief set are disjoint. Thus we have genuine disagreement.

What makes this disagreement non-faultless is that there are facts that can resolve the dispute decisively in favor of A or of B: we can just measure John's height. As long as John is sufficiently tall or sufficiently short, this measurement can confirm either A or B. If this information is available, then it provides the correct way to resolve the disagreement.

V. Disagreement about the Discourse

The explanation for (one kind of) faultless disagreement closely resembles the disagreement pictured above, except that the disagreement is about the discourse, rather than about the world. As a result, the belief sets differ along the vertical dimension, rather than along the horizontal dimension.

(6) Q. Look, there's John. What counts as tall around here?
A. John is tall.
B. No, John is not tall.

In this scenario, there is general agreement about John's height, at least, up to a moderate degree of precision. Some uncertainty remains (in Figure 4, the shaded region, corresponding to the initial context set, has non-zero width), but this uncertainty is not enough to affect the outcome. There is considerably more uncertainty about what constitutes an appropriate standard for height in the circumstances of the discourse. According to A, the standard falls within a fairly narrow range of low values, a range low enough that John

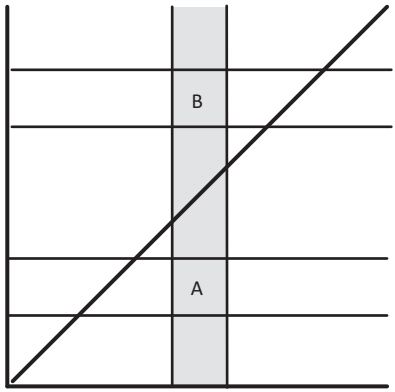

Figure 4. Disagreement about the state of the discourse.

definitely counts as tall. According to B, the standard falls within a fairly narrow range of higher values, a range far too high for John to count as tall. Because the belief sets of A and B are disjoint, once again we have genuine disagreement.

In this case, it is much more difficult to find facts that can definitively select a winner. There can nevertheless be a fact of the matter: what determines a standard is the prevailing pattern of use in the community. If the relevant speech community has a consistently narrow range of viable standards for tallness, it is possible that exactly one of the two claimants is in conformance with the relevant use convention. For instance, if the dispute concerns the status of the tallest basketball player in the NBA, A is right and B is wrong.

The predicament of the discourse participants is that even if there is a fact of the matter, neither of them has the authority to decide what it is. Generally, individual speakers do not have privileged authority over any other speaker with respect to judging what the prevailing standards are.

That means that evidence in favor of one claim or the other must be indirect at best. It might be possible to bring the following sort of evidence to bear: 'But B! Just yesterday I heard you assert that Bill, who is a little bit shorter than John, is tall.' This may cause B to reconsider, in order to create at least the appearance of self-consistency over time. Yet he is not compelled to do so: just as the facts about John's height can change over time, so too can the standards for vague predicates drift one way or the other.

Even if A canvasses each member of the surrounding speech community, and they all judge John to be clearly tall, B need not capitulate. He risks being excluded from the community as not conforming to communicative norms, but that is a different thing from being forced to admit that he is mistaken in his claim about John's tallness.

My diagnosis of the kind of faultless disagreement that arises from disputes about vague predicates, including predicates of personal taste, then, is that it is a combination of two things: the irrelevance of facts concerning the part of the world under discussion (in this case, the heights of the individuals being discussed) for resolving the dispute; and symmetry between the discourse participants with respect to the judgments under consideration (that no one has superior authority when it comes to assessing communicative norms).

VI. Whether a Disagreement about Taste is Faultless Depends on Previous Discourse

The dynamic view predicts that not all disputes about taste are faultless, familiar proverbs saying otherwise notwithstanding. Consider this discourse:

(7) B. John is tall, and Tom is a little bit taller than John.
A. So, Tom is tall.
B. No, Tom is not tall.

In this case, A is within her rights to accuse B of making a mistake. If B's first statement is accepted, and the context set is updated to reflect its content, then the discourse participants are committed to judging anyone taller than John as tall, at least for the rest of the discourse (holding the relevant comparison class fixed, say, tall for a professional jockey). What B ends up saying in (7) is false: Tom does count as tall, by the standards made evident by previous discourse.

We can adapt this scenario to predicates of personal taste:

(8) A1. That chili was tasty.
B1. Yes.
A2. This chili is tastier than that chili.
B2. Yes.
A3. So, this chili is tasty.
B3. No, this chili is not tasty.

In this case, we have a dispute over taste: the exchange labeled A3 and B3 has the form of the paradigm illustration of faultless disagreement: A asserts that some chili is tasty, and B asserts the opposite. But in this case, the disagreement is not remotely faultless—A is right, and B is mistaken, given the constraints imposed by the previous discourse.

Thus the dynamic view correctly predicts that not all disagreements about personal taste are faultless.

VII. Disagreement about the Discourse That are Not about Cutoffs

So far I have concentrated on situations in which the only relevant respect along which discourses differ is in where cutoffs for vague predicates lie. But of

course disputes about tastiness and other predicates can also depend on other aspects of the situation. Sometimes the dispute arises from a disagreement about just how tasty a particular food is in the first place, that is, about what degree of tastiness a food has, rather than whether that degree is above the threshold for counting as tasty.

For instance, Crespo argues that judgments of tastiness must be grounded by direct sensory experience.[18] For her, the sensation of tastiness or funness or coldness is something that a subject cannot be mistaken about, just as we cannot be mistaken about the presence of pain: to feel pain is for pain to be present, to experience cold is for it to be cold. But if different people respond to the same circumstances with a different sensory experience, whether it is because of difference in sensitivity to cold, or a different pattern of taste receptors on the tongue, then their judgments of coldness or tastiness for the same input will differ for reasons other than the location of a vague cutoff. A complete explanation must account for the subjectivity of judgments of taste.

Similarly, Sundell has emphasized that taste judgments are assertions about norms.[19] I agree that faultless disagreement is disagreement about norms, though not necessarily aesthetic norms: in the case of temperature, wealth, and tallness, the norms are about concrete, measurable properties, and the disagreement concerns the cutoff point for applicability of a vague predicate. In the more general case, predicates like *good*, *beautiful*, and the like depend also on norms for which certain aspects of an object are relevant for the judgment in question (size, weight, and shape may be important, but cost, spatial orientation, and surroundings less so), as well as the norms for convolving the relevant aspects into a judgment of the degree to which the object possesses the property in question.

These factors can be accommodated in the view, as long as we are willing to assume that such norms constitute part of the discourse, rather than being part of the world under discussion. So if you are a realist about norms, and believe that they are part of the world independent of language, the view defended here cannot help you; but if you are a constructivist, and believe that norms arise from negotiation with your fellow judges, we can suppose that the mapping from objects to the degree to which they possess some property is mediated by normative facts that are a part of the discourse situation. Then, if we differ in our opinions about the amount of capsaicin that is compatible with tastiness in chili, a complete account of our discourse assumptions would have to recognize our mutual uncertainty about the importance of that taste element. And if our opinions about capsaicin differ violently enough, we may

[18]Crespo, 'Against Degree-Based Semantics'.
[19]Sundell, 'Disagreements about Taste'. See also discussion of evaluative adjectives such as *good* in Hare, *Language of Morals*, 112.

have belief sets that are entirely disjoint, in which case we have a proper disagreement.

I will not say anything concrete here about the phenomenology of tastiness, let alone how precisely to model the complicated multi-dimensional function that maps objects to degrees of tastiness. But as long as we can assume that whenever two people disagree about such functions they have materially different assumptions about the discourse situation, then the account of here of faultless disagreement generalizes smoothly to such cases.

Heading into more radical territory, if we can disagree about the cutoffs of vague predicates, we can imagine also disagreeing about the meanings of the predicates themselves. And indeed, although it is not easy to tell where to draw the line, assertions that negotiate cutoffs can shade off into uses that are covertly definitional. Peter Pagin (pers. comm.) offers a scenario in which two people are viewing a light rain through a window. One person is a fluent speaker of English, the other is less so.

(9) Is it drizzling?

Both discourse participants are mutually sure about the exactly amount of water that is falling in front of the window, so this question is not about worldly facts. Nor is it a desire to know the meaning of the word: both participants know that *drizzling* means (roughly) *raining lightly*. The only uncertainty concerns the cutoff point for a sufficiently light rain to count as a drizzle.

Lassiter emphasizes the connection between vagueness and negotiating bounds of conventional language use. He advocates a theory which is

> a development of David Lewis' [1970] suggestion that 'languages themselves are free of vagueness but . . . the linguistic conventions of a population, or the linguistic habits of a person, select not a point but a fuzzy region in the space of precise languages'. Uncertainty about application of a predicate is uncertainty about which exact language we are speaking. Use of a vague predicate applied to a borderline individual invites the interlocutor to behave as if the language under use is one in which the predicate applies.[20]

On Lassiter's view, then, negotiating standards amounts to negotiating which class of languages we are speaking (or rather, negotiating which class of languages we want to begin speaking). Along similar lines, Ludlow suggests that we routinely negotiate which language we are speaking, even when we are in the middle of a conversation.[21]

[20] Lassiter, 'Vagueness as Probabilistic Linguistic Knowledge', 129.

[21] E.g., Ludlow, *Living Words*.

In terms of the model given here, uncertainty about the set of discourses provided by the context set can range from relatively innocent uncertainty about where it would be most expedient to draw a cutoff for use of a vague predicate, to more radical uncertainty about what words mean,[22] to even more radical uncertainty about which language the discourse at hand is being conducted in.

But a reasonable person can reject the notion that the meanings of words are routinely up for negotiation. After all, as Stalnaker reminds us, if we agree to call a horse's tail a leg, how many legs does a horse have? Just four, since calling a tail a leg does not make it a leg.[23] Nothing in the view here forces the meanings of words to be in play. Rather, we can assume that word meanings are presupposed, i.e., constant across every discourse under consideration in the context set.

VIII. Some Non-Commitments about Vagueness

Glanzberg offers a contextualist response to Lasersohn's relativism.[24]

(10) A. This chili is tasty. $\mathbf{tasty}_E(\mathbf{chili}) > \mathbf{s}(\mathbf{tasty}_E)$

(11) B. This chili is not tasty. $\mathbf{tasty}_E(\mathbf{chili}) \not> \mathbf{s}(\mathbf{tasty}_E)$

On Glanzberg's view, the extension of *tasty* depends on at least two things: an experiencer (or set of experiencers) E, which is provided by the context of utterance; and on a delineation function **s** mapping predicates to a vague standard. These elements of context help determine the propositions expressed by (10) and (11) on any occasion of use, but do not form any part of the denotation itself, which can be modeled as a simple set of worlds, namely those worlds in which the degree of tastiness (glossed as tastiness according to E's lights) exceeds the relevant standard in that context as revealed by **s**.

With that setup as background, here is what Glanzberg has to say about faultless disagreement:

> Lasersohn, and a number of other contemporary relativists, point out that their notion of relative truth offers a notion of 'faultless disagreement', where two utterances express disagreement, even though neither is incorrect . . . . From a traditional, non-relativist, point of view, this idea is prima facie absurd: if two propositions express disagreement, one must fail to be correct . . . . My own inclination is to side with

[22] As in Armstrong, *Meanings on the Fly.*

[23] Stalnaker, 'Assertion'.

[24] Glanzberg, 'Context, Content, and Relativism'.

> the traditional view, and reject the notion of faultless disagreement as absurd.[25]

And indeed, relative to any context set in which E and **s** is fixed, exactly one of (10) and (11) will be true, and Glanzberg's criticism will apply.

How plausible is it to assume that we can always find a suitable E and **s**? Deciding just who should count as the set of relevant people is tricky.[26] Stephenson gives control over the set of assessors to the grammar, which enables her to unify taste assertions with examples that motivate epistemic relativism.[27] That is, for Stephenson, the compositional semantics delivers a suitable value for E, depending in part on the syntactic construction involved. Pearson, building on work of Moltmann concerning first-person genericity, suggests instead that taste judgments assert that something is tasty to people in general, based on first-person experience.[28]

On the view here, the reason it is so difficult to pin down the membership of E is that the relevant group of judgers corresponds to the speech community itself, the group that defines the conventions of the language.

But despite these difficulties, let us suppose that there is such an E, though it may be difficult or impractical ever to figure out reliably its exact membership on any particular occasion. That still leaves us with the problem of determining a suitable value for the delineation function **s**. I see no justification for supposing that there can be a precise, mutually agreeable function **s**. Rather, as I have suggested in this paper, it goes to the very heart of vagueness that we cannot be sure of what the right choice for **s** is. If there is any uncertainty about **s** at all, we arrive at the view proposed here. With respect to each individual evaluation point, Glanzberg is right: there is a fact of the matter, and exactly one of (10) and (11) is true. But relative to any realistic context set, some evaluation points will verify one sentence, and other evaluation points will verify the other. So the context as whole will entail neither one of the sentences, and faultlessness is not only not absurd, it is typical.

To be sure, on an epistemic view of vagueness as in Williamson,[29] there is supposed to be a single correct master delineation function, though we cannot ever know which function it is. Such a view would say that there is always a fact of the matter as to whether (10) or (11) is true, and that one or the other of the speakers is at fault—we just cannot ever know for sure which one.

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[25] Ibid, 16.

[26] For some relevant discussion, see Wolf and Cohen, 'Clarity as Objectivized Belief'; Barker, 'Commentary on Wolf and Cohen'.

[27] Stephenson, 'Judge Dependence'.

[28] Pearson, 'Judge-Free Semantics'; Moltmann, 'Relative Truth'.

[29] Williamson, *Vagueness*.

In order to make the epistemic assumption more plausible, consider the parallel between uncertainty over standards versus uncertainty over facts. Then assuming that there is some exact standard for tallness is parallel to assuming that a particular individual has an exact maximal degree of height, even if we can never measure that height with complete precision.

But I am not aware of any linguistic evidence that forces us to make the strong epistemic claim. Therefore, I will assume only that there is a range of possible values for **s**, and we have no justification for favoring one over the other. Nor is there any linguistic justification for believing that any one of those possibilities is secretly correct; rather, it appears that any of the possibilities are equally negotiable, i.e., equally available for elimination through update.

As our information grows—as we improve our knowledge about John's precise maximal degree of height—we reduce uncertainty over the way the world is. Similarly, as our discourse unfolds, we progressively refine our assumptions about the viable standards for tallness and other vague predicates. We do this by asserting that some borderline individual or other counts as tall or not tall. This will eliminate some candidate delineations, leaving others. Each such update will remove only part of the uncertainty, leaving some reduced, but sill non-zero, amount of uncertainty.

I assume that a context is realistic only if there is non-trivial uncertainty about the precise facts in the world (how tall is John exactly?—recalling the diagrams given above, the context set has non-zero horizontal extent) as well as non-trivial uncertainty about the prevailing standards (how tall does someone have to be to count as tall?—the context set has non-zero vertical extent). The assumption that any appropriate context has uncertainty over standards is often called the Tolerance assumption.

At this point, a brief comment on what this view says (or, rather, does not say) about the sorites paradox, which goes like this: there is no n such such that n grains of sand is not a heap, but $n + 1$ grains is a heap; yet if we add grains of sand to a non-heap, eventually we get a heap. The dynamic perspective views the sorites as a puzzle about the ways that context might evolve over time, as we add one more grain to the pile. Recalling the diagram above in example (3) (Figure 2), a sorites forced march requires a subject to make judgments that move one boundary of the borderline region ever closer and closer to the opposite edge. This puts pressure on the Tolerance assumption, which says that there must always be a non-trivial region of uncertainty. Maintaining Tolerance as the forced march continues eventually will require moving the cutoff boundary into the region that was originally part of the positive or negative extension of the predicate. In the most drastic case, the context set can shift so dramatically that an object that was clearly in the positive extension of a predicate could come to be clearly in the negative extension. This is one

of the possibilities that I take the views of Raffman and Shapiro to suggest.[30] Such a violent shifting of the borderline region can produce a context set that is inconsistent (i.e., disjoint) with the original context set. The power of the paradox, then, is that it forces us to give up the reassuring picture of normal update on which the updated context set is always a subset of the initial context set. Fortunately, we humans are robust reasoners, and have no lasting difficulty living with a belief set that is inconsistent with some recently held belief set.

In any case, I will assume that at any given moment, a context set is appropriate only if it exhibits uncertainly along both major dimensions (facts in the world under discussion, facts about the discourse involving vague standards), and I will call this assumption Tolerance. So my view is compatible with many accounts of the sorites, as long as that solution is compatible with Tolerance.

IX. Some Non-Commitments about Faultlessness

The non-commitments about vagueness just discussed correspond directly to some non-commitments about the nature of faultlessness.

We can distinguish two kinds of faultless disagreement. In one kind, the discourse participants are equally blameless as long as there is no practical way for any of them to acquire the knowledge required to resolve the dispute. Call this epistemic faultlessness. In the other kind of faultless disagreement, the reason the participants are blameless is because there really is no fact of the matter; call this absolute faultlessness. To use an example suggested to me by Janice Dowell, imagine two astrophysicists arguing about whether dark matter exists in, say, 1985. One physicists says 'It exists', the other one says 'It doesn't exist', and there is no practical way for either of them to find out whether they are right, at least, no way known in 1985. Yet dark matter either exists or not, so there is a fact of the matter. The physicists are epistemically faultless, but not absolutely faultless.

Because the view here is compatible with an epistemic view of vagueness, it is possible to claim that the only kind of faultless disagreement provided by the analysis is merely epistemic faultlessness: there is a fact of the matter, since there is a precise cutoff for counting as tall. Unfortunately for us fallible humans, it is impossible to gain access to the precise cutoff, and we just have to live with permanent uncertainty.

But, as explained above, nothing in the view forces an epistemic view of vagueness. If we reject epistemicism, we are free to decide that people disagreeing about the tastiness of a bowl of chili are absolutely faultless. Just as we might deny that a particular person has any perfectly precise degree of height, in view of the quantum superposition of the subatomic particles

[30] Raffman, 'Vagueness without Paradox'; Shapiro, *Vagueness in Context*.

interpenetrating the tip of the highest hair on that person's head, we might also deny that there could be even in principle a precise cutoff for tallness that would legitimately reflect the norms for appropriate use in a suitable community of speakers.

In sum, nothing in the view is inconsistent with the claim that there is no fact, either in the world or in the discourse, that determines fully precise cutoffs. In other words, it is possible to take the dynamic view advocated here, and still deny epistemicism.

X. Conclusions

On the dynamic view, truth of a vague ascription is not relative to a judge or assessor: content depends on context in the usual way, and reflects information both about the facts in the world, as well as assumptions about the conventions for use of a vague predicate, along with other facts about the state of the discourse.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Ben Caplan, Ines Crespo, Janice Dowell, Andrew Egan, Svetlana Godjevac, Joanna Odrow-Sypniewska, Francis Jeffry Pelletier, Galit Sassoon, Timothy Sundell, Igor Yanovich, philosophy audiences at Ohio State University, University of California, Davis, New York University, and Rutgers, and the participants of the Dubrovnik conference on relativism.

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