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## JUDGE-SPECIFIC SENTENCES ABOUT PERSONAL TASTE, INDEXICAL CONTEXTUALISM, AND DISAGREEMENT

### Abstract

The paper aims to weaken a widespread argument against indexical contextualism regarding matters of personal taste. According to indexical contextualism, an utterance of “T is tasty” (where T is an object of taste) expresses the proposition *that T is tasty for J* (where J is a judge). This argument suggests that indexical contextualism cannot do justice to our disagreement intuitions regarding typical disputes about personal taste because it has to treat conversations in which one speaker utters “T is tasty” and another responds with “T is not tasty” (referred to as ‘judge-non-specific conversations’ in this paper) as being on a par with conversations in which one speaker utters “T is tasty to me” and another responds with “T is not tasty to me” (referred to as ‘judge-specific conversations’). The argument has it that judge-specific conversations, unlike judge-non-specific conversations, do not contain disagreement between speakers. To defend indexical contextualism, some philosophers have proposed accounts (here referred to as ‘dual-proposition theories’) according to which utterances of “T is tasty” are used to communicate both the above kinds of semantically expressed proposition and some other kinds of proposition (like superiority propositions or metalinguistic propositions) that could be used to explain disagreements about taste. The paper defends two claims: First, it is argued that judge-specific conversations, or at least some of them, do contain disagreement between speakers, contrary to what the anti-indexical-contextualist argument supposes. Second, it is argued that dual-proposition indexical-contextualist theories fail to explain judge-specific conversations that are intuitively interpreted as containing disagreement.

**Keywords:** disagreement about matters of personal taste, dual-proposition indexical contextualism, indexical contextualism, judge-non-specific taste sentence, judge-specific taste sentence

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A typical argument against contextualism regarding predicates of personal taste – particularly, its indexical versions – claims that it cannot do justice to our disagreement intuitions. Typically, Ben can be perceived as disagreeing with Ann in the following conversation:<sup>1</sup>

- (1)        Ann: This cake is tasty.  
              Ben: This cake isn't tasty.

According to indexical contextualism, “is tasty” expresses a binary relation between an object of taste and a judge.<sup>2</sup> Assuming that the utterances in (1) are used in the autocentric sense, Ann’s utterance expresses the proposition *that this cake is tasty to Ann*, and Ben’s utterance expresses the proposition *that this cake is not tasty to Ben*.<sup>3</sup> Since these two propositions are perfectly compatible, the argument suggests that Ann and Ben do not disagree with one another because disagreements assume some sort of opposition between the speakers. This outcome does not concur with our well-entrenched intuitions that they do disagree with one another, or so it is argued.

We can distinguish between *judge-non-specific taste sentences* like “T is tasty (delicious, disgusting, salted, etc.)” and *judge-specific taste sentences*

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<sup>1</sup>I do not submit that the participants in real-life conversations communicate in the same way as Ann and Ben in the toy dialogue in (1) (and other dialogues to be given below). The toy examples are supposed to capture just the gist of disagreements about matters of personal taste to be found in more elaborated real-life conversations that take place in particular conversational settings and are intended to produce particular impacts on the conversational participants.

<sup>2</sup>This is an oversimplified statement that is open to various renderings. According to one view, sentences of the form “T is tasty” (where T is an object of taste) contain an implicit variable (occurring at the level of logical form) that ranges over judges, standards of taste, or perspectives (the choice depends on particular approaches). According to another view, there is no implicit variable; yet, judges, standards of taste, or perspectives find their way into the propositions expressed because of some processes operating at the pragmatic level. Still another view has it that predicates of taste like “is tasty” are indexical expressions themselves; thus, relative to a context of use, they make various contributions to the expressed propositions. I remain neutral regarding these (and perhaps some other) options. The oversimplified idea given in the main text suffices for my purposes in the present paper. For the sake of simplicity, I work with the judge parameter instead of perspectives or standards of taste. Nothing important hinges on this choice and it could be replaced by any of the other parameters.

<sup>3</sup>If used in an autocentric sense, an utterance of “T is tasty” is to be assessed from the speaker’s perspective; if used in an exocentric sense, it is to be assessed from someone else’s perspective than the speaker’s (usually, it is contextually determined which perspective is to be considered). Regarding the notions of autocentric and exocentric uses, see particularly (Lasersohn 2005); see also (Egan 2010).

like “J find(s) T tasty (delicious, disgusting, salted, etc.)” or “T is tasty (delicious, disgusting, salted, etc.) to (for) J” (where T is an object of taste and J is a judge).<sup>4</sup> The argument suggests that indexical contextualism distorts the nature of conversations in which speakers utter judge-non-specific taste sentences (let’s call them *judge-non-specific conversations*) because it treats them as being on a par with conversations in which speakers utter judge-specific taste sentences (let’s call them *judge-specific conversations*). The judge-non-specific conversation in (1) is supposed to be on a par with judge-specific conversations like those involved in (2) and (3):

- (2)           Ann: This cake tastes good to me.  
              Ben: This cake doesn’t taste good to me.
- (3)           Ann: I find this cake tasty.  
              Ben: I don’t find this cake tasty.

It is argued that Ann and Ben are not in disagreement in (2) and (3). They simply do not assert incompatible things. If they disagreed – the argument usually continues – the same would have to be said about the conversation produced by uttering the sentences in (4):

- (4)           Ann: I’m hungry.  
              Ben: I’m not hungry.

No sane intuition would treat this exchange as disagreement. Accordingly, judge-non-specific conversations call for a different treatment than judge-specific conversations. Since indexical contextualism does not have sufficient theoretical resources to account for judge-non-specific conversations differently than for judge-specific conversations – the argument concludes – it must be on the wrong track.<sup>5</sup>

Contextualists have responded by devising several strategies to preserve the difference between these two kinds of conversations. I shall review some of them in due course. At this stage, however, I would like to point out that a judge-non-specific conversation is not as remote from a judge-specific con-

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<sup>4</sup> I am going to talk about gustatory taste rather than some other kinds of taste. Other kinds of taste (pertaining to the predicates like “is rich,” “is fun,” “is sexy,” etc.) could be easily taken on board too.

<sup>5</sup> Versions of this argument have been developed by many authors. See, in particular, (Baker 2012: 110), (Kölbel 2004: 63), (Laserson 2005: 648–649), (MacFarlane 2007: 18–19), and the works of other defenders of relativism about predicates of personal taste in its various guises.

versation as the above argument invites us to admit. If I am right, there are close resemblances between them that could justify, at least to a certain extent, the application of the same explanation, or at least very similar explanations, to both. Based on this, the indexical contextualist treatment according to which a judge-specific conversation is close to a judge-non-specific conversation could be a virtue rather than a vice. Besides, it could be argued that even though the conversation in (4) differs from those in (2) and (3) in certain vital respects, there could be utterances of ordinary indexical sentences that would be rather close to taste sentences when it comes to disagreement. I shall briefly touch on this point too.

My aims in the present paper are twofold. First, I will vindicate the idea that utterances of judge-specific taste sentences can be used to produce disagreements between speakers in the same – or a very similar – way as utterances of judge-non-specific taste sentences. More specifically, my central hypothesis runs as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Speakers sometimes express disagreements about matters of personal taste in judge-specific conversations.

Disagreements of this kind also call for an explanation that is analogical to the explanation of the disagreements expressed in judge-non-specific conversations. Moreover, it seems that both instances of disagreements could be open to the same treatment. Based on this, the anti-indexical-contextualist line of argumentation summarized above is not persuasive.

Second, this is not to say that indexical contextualism is off the hook. There are various versions of this approach, some of which are more successful than others. In particular, there are versions that put much weight on the above argument and thus try to find theoretical resources to distinguish between the two kinds of conversations. Some of these versions suggest that speakers in judge-non-specific conversations – unlike those in judge-specific conversations – communicate not just the propositions semantically expressed by their utterances but also propositions of another kind that could be used to explain our disagreement intuitions. For want of a better term, I label them *dual-proposition indexical-contextualist* theories. Now, if Hypothesis 1 is correct, the dual-proposition indexical-contextualist theories seem to face trouble because they can explain disagreements in the case of judge-non-specific conversations only at the cost of jeopardizing their prospects of explaining disagreements in the case of judge-specific conversations. The problem they face is summarized in my second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** Dual-proposition indexical-contextualist theories – at least many of them – are not in a position to explain disagreements about matters of personal taste in judge-specific conversations by using their existent theoretical resources.

In saying this, I do not imply that indexical contextualism fails in general and that it has to be replaced by another kind of approach. Rather, I suggest we should opt for another kind of indexical-contextualist-friendly strategy. The market offers plenty of such approaches.

The paper is structured as follows. I start by defending the idea that speakers can successfully disagree about matters of personal taste when they utter judge-specific taste sentences. Admittedly, when uttering judge-specific taste sentences, the speakers express compatible propositions. Based on this, the notion of disagreement that is suitable for such cases differs from the typical notions that are applicable to other areas (Section 2). I then briefly point out that we can possibly find disagreements between speakers who utter ordinary indexical sentences that express compatible propositions (relative to the relevant contexts of use). Accordingly, the disagreement instances dealt with in Section 2 do not have to seem far-fetched (Section 3). Finally, I turn to dual-proposition indexical-contextualist theories and show that they are unsatisfactory because they cannot explain the disagreements about matters of personal taste discussed in Section 2. This criticism paves the way toward the conclusion that a successful indexical-contextualist theory should not create unnecessary gaps between judge-non-specific conversations and judge-specific conversations (Section 4). A summary of the main results concludes the paper.

## 2. JUDGE-SPECIFIC SENTENCES AND DISAGREEMENT ABOUT PERSONAL TASTE

Some might claim that people do not express disagreements about matters of personal taste in judge-specific conversations. The conversations captured in (2) and (3) do not involve disagreements between the speakers because they merely present their individual views without rejecting what the other has said.<sup>6</sup> By asserting that the cake does not taste good to him, Ben does not deny

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the claim “that acknowledging that one has been talking about one’s own taste strongly suggests that there was no genuine disagreement in the first place” (Stojanovic 2007: 693). I do not wish to imply, however, that Stojanovic accepts the anti-indexical-contextualist argument from Section 1.

Ann's claim to the effect that the cake tastes good to her, and vice versa. The two claims are fully compatible.

The rationale behind this reasoning is usually based on a particular view about disagreement that is captured in the following definition:

**Definition 1:** Person X disagrees with person Y about the object of taste T iff X accepts the proposition *that T is P* and Y rejects the proposition *that T is P*.

The notion of accepting a proposition is to be understood rather broadly. Person X can be said to accept the proposition *that T is P* not just when she believes it but also merely (temporarily) assumes it or accommodates it for some purposes. Accepting and rejecting are incompatible attitudes, and the former could be defined in terms of the latter as follows:

**Definition 2:** Person X rejects a proposition *p* iff there is a proposition *q* such that (i) X accepts *q* and (ii)  $p \wedge q$  is false.

The notion of rejection is broad enough to cover both *p* being contradictory with *q*, and *p* being contrary to *q*. In either case, *p* and *q* present incompatible contents. It is also broad enough to cover a case in which person X believes that *p* is incompatible with *q*, and a case in which X is not aware of the incompatibility between *p* and *q*. Based on this, X rejects *p* provided she accepts a proposition that is incompatible with *p* but does not recognize the incompatibility between the propositions.

Returning to the dialogue in (2), if Ann accepts the proposition *that this cake tastes good to Ann* and Ben accepts the proposition *that this cake does not taste good to Ben*, they cannot be said to disagree with one another because the proposition *that this cake tastes good to Ann and does not taste good to Ben* is not a falsehood, meaning that the two conjuncts are compatible. Accordingly, Ben's acceptance of the proposition *that this cake does not taste good to Ben* does not make him reject the proposition *that this cake tastes good to Ann*. The same holds for the dialogue in (3).

Some people find the notion of disagreement introduced in Definition 1 to be of limited applicability because it focuses only on propositional content. They claim that there are instances of disagreement that do not fall under the notion so defined, meaning that some other legitimate modes of disagreement are to be discerned beyond the propositional disagreement.<sup>7</sup> It seems to me

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, (Beddor 2019), (Buekens 2011), (Gutzmann 2016), (Huvenes 2012), (Marques 2014), (Marques, García-Carpintero 2014), (Plunkett, Sundell 2013),



case. Ben may fully accept that the cake tastes good to Ann yet disagree with her regarding its gustatory qualities. At the same time, indexical contextualism cannot admit that their disagreement does not consist in Ann definitively accepting the proposition that the cake is tasty and Ben rejecting this proposition. We thus need a different account of what their disagreement consists of. Below, I introduce a more comprehensive notion of disagreement than the one specified in Definition 1. It will make room for perceiving the disagreement in the conversation captured in (5) as having a non-propositional basis.<sup>9</sup>

Now, turn to the conversations in (2) and (3). At first blush, Ann and Ben do not seem to disagree. Nevertheless, upon a closer look, there could be situations in which they do. Suppose that after Ann's and Ben's utterances, Cal asks Ben:

(7) Ben, did you mean to express a disagreement with Ann?

Admittedly, either of the following replies could be acceptable:

(8) No, not at all. We simply have different palates regarding such tastes. She is entitled to have her taste preferences, and I am entitled to have my own. That's all I can say about that.

(9) Yes, I did. Actually, I can't see why she finds the cake tasty. Her palate must be spoiled. I admit she finds the cake tasty, but I still disagree with her.

Besides, neither response suggests that Ben would intend to cast doubt on whether the cake tastes good to Ann. It is the other way around: he appears to be accepting that the cake tastes good to her. We can even admit that, in both cases, he recognizes Ann as a fully competent person regarding her taste preferences. There is a difference between the two responses, though. If responding as in (8), Ben admits that Ann's taste preferences regarding the cake are worthwhile (at least) for her, although he finds the cake distasteful. If responding as in (9), however, he questions the very idea of Ann's taste preferences regarding the cake being worthwhile (neither for her nor for anyone else). Anyway, if (9) were Ben's reply, Cal could truly report on the exchange by uttering any of the sentences contained in (6).

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<sup>9</sup> I am not going to elaborate an explanation along these lines in the present paper because I have done so elsewhere (see, in particular, Zouhar 2018). The account in question belongs to the family of explanations that treat taste disagreements in terms of non-doxastic attitudes (see footnote 11 and (Zouhar 2018) for other relevant references).

Since the conversations in (2) and (3) make room for either continuation, there are cases in which speakers can express disagreement by uttering judge-specific taste sentences. Admittedly, it is up to Ben to decide whether he intends to disagree with Ann or not. If he does, we have to take his utterance of “This cake doesn’t taste good to me” or “I don’t find this cake tasty” as a full-blooded mark of disagreement. In other words, in many situations Ben would not be required to say or do anything else over and above what he has already said and done to express his disagreement with Ann or to make his disagreement manifest.

Now, although Ben may legitimately respond to Cal’s question in (7) as he did in either (8) or (9), there is a simple test to show that the interpretation that Ben disagrees with Ann in (2) and (3) is a bit more natural than the interpretation that he does not. Suppose that after (2) or (3) take place, Ben adds (perhaps after a moment of reflection):

- (10) As I said, the cake doesn’t taste good to me, but I don’t disagree with you.

To my ears, this is an acceptable claim in the envisioned scenario. In saying this, Ben makes it plain that he is prepared to tolerate Ann’s taste preferences, although his preferences are different. Suppose, however, that Ben utters (11) instead of (10):

- (11) As I said, the cake doesn’t taste good to me; moreover, I disagree with you.

To my ears, (11) is much less acceptable than (10). The use of “moreover” implies that a new piece of information is going to be added to what has already been said. Since the second part of Ben’s assertion beginning with “moreover” has the air of inappropriateness, it could hardly be said to involve a novel piece of information that is not already contained in the first part of his assertion. Based on this, I take it that we are more likely to treat the conversations in (2) and (3) as being disagreements than not. If they are not to be intended or understood as disagreements, one had better make this plain by adding a claim along such lines (as in (10)); instead, if it is to be a case of disagreement, one is required to do nothing at all – all that has to be said and done is already contained in Ben’s claims in (2) and (3).

The above disagreements about taste occurred in conversations between speakers. To use Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne’s terms (see Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009: 60), they are instances of *disagreements as ac-*

*tivity*. Cal's reports in (6) describe a particular event to which both Ann and Ben somehow contributed by their respective acts of uttering certain sentences in a face-to-face exchange, so to speak. We can, however, discern another kind of case, namely *disagreement as a state* (see Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009: 60).<sup>10</sup> Suppose there are two unrelated situations in which Ann and Ben utter their respective lines from (2) or (3). In particular, Ann asserts "This cake tastes good to me" or "I find this cake tasty" in one situation, and Ben asserts "This cake doesn't taste good to me" or "I don't find this cake tasty" in the other. Besides, each of them is completely unaware of the other's assertion (they may not even be aware of the other's existence). Is Cal in a position to mark their utterances (or beliefs, thoughts, etc.) as a case of disagreement?

It seems to me that he is. Recall the situation in which Cal addressed his question in (7) to Ben after the conversations in (2) or (3). The very fact that posing such a clarificatory question is a legitimate contribution to an ongoing conversation without shifting its subject matter suggests that the conversation is open to various renderings. Now, in the above case in which Ann and Ben express their views regarding the cake's taste without discussing them with one another, Cal could be in a position to ask himself: Would Ann and Ben view themselves as disagreeing about the cake's taste had they made their respective assertions in a face-to-face conversation? The legitimacy of such a query suggests that interpreting Ann's and Ben's utterances as an instance of disagreement is a viable option. Based on this, Cal can take Ann's utterance of "This cake tastes good to me" or "I find this cake tasty" and Ben's utterance of "This cake doesn't taste good to me" or "I don't find this cake tasty" as an instance of disagreement. By their respective utterances, Ann and Ben make plain their views regarding the cake's gustatory qualities. Ann suggests that she likes the taste, while Ben suggests otherwise. Accordingly, Cal is in a position to understand the utterances in two ways. One way is that upon recognizing that Ann likes the taste and Ben dislikes it, Cal could realize that Ann liking the taste is fully compatible with Ben disliking it, full stop. The other way is that he may realize that Ann cannot begin to dislike the cake's gustatory qualities without abandoning her original position and Ben cannot start liking it without abandoning his respective original position. No disagreement seems forthcoming for Cal in the former case. In the latter case, though, it is the other way around.

Regardless of whether we consider disagreements as activities or states, the notion of disagreement introduced in Definition 1 does not apply to the

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<sup>10</sup>We can also consider a case of *speechless disagreements* (see Beddor 2019: 825), where two speakers disagree although they do not voice their beliefs or assumptions. The considerations given in the main text can be extended to speechless disagreements too.

above instances. Fortunately, in the literature one can find some options that fit the current examples better. It could be promising to use a recent proposal by Jeremy Wyatt (see Wyatt 2021).<sup>11</sup> The basic idea is that if accepting one proposition regarding matters of personal taste requires an agent to have certain preferences, and accepting another proposition about the same matters of personal taste requires another agent to have preferences that are type-noncotenable with the former, the two agents disagree with one another. Type-noncotenability is based on anonymized variants of preferences (see Wyatt 2021: 10749). Assuming that A is a particular agent, an anonymized variant of the preference for A doing  $\alpha$  rather than  $\beta$  (other things being equal, “o.t.b.e.” henceforth) is the preference for doing  $\alpha$  rather than  $\beta$  (o.t.b.e.). Different agents could be in a position to have the same anonymized preference for doing  $\alpha$  rather than  $\beta$  (o.t.b.e.) with respect to themselves. Rigorous definitions of the above notions are the following:<sup>12</sup>

**Definition 3:** Person X disagrees with person Y about the object of taste T iff (i) X accepts the proposition *that T is P*; (ii) Y accepts the proposition *that T is Q*; (iii) X’s acceptance of the proposition *that T is P* requires from X having the preference for X doing  $\phi$  rather than  $\chi$  (o.t.b.e.) regarding T; (iv) Y’s acceptance of the proposition *that T is Q* requires from Y having the preference for Y doing  $\psi$  rather than  $\omega$  (o.t.b.e.) regarding T; and (v) the preference for X doing  $\phi$  rather than  $\chi$  (o.t.b.e.) and the preference for Y doing  $\psi$  rather than  $\omega$  (o.t.b.e.) are type-noncotenable.

**Definition 4:** Given that X and Y are persons, the preference for X doing  $\phi$  rather than  $\chi$  (o.t.b.e.) is type-noncotenable with the preference for Y doing  $\psi$  rather than  $\omega$  (o.t.b.e.) iff (i) there is an anonymized variant of the preference for X doing  $\phi$  rather than  $\chi$  (o.t.b.e.), namely the preference for doing  $\phi$  rather than  $\chi$  (o.t.b.e.); (ii) there is an anonymized variant of the preference for Y doing  $\psi$  rather than  $\omega$  (o.t.b.e.), namely the preference for doing  $\psi$  rather than  $\omega$  (o.t.b.e.); and (iii) there is no person Z that could coherently have both the preference for doing

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<sup>11</sup> Some other (kinds of) proposals available for indexical contextualism can be found in (Beddor 2019), (Buekens 2011), (Clapp 2015), (Huvenes 2012, 2014), (Karczewska 2021), (Marques 2014, 2015), (Marques, García-Carpintero 2014), (Silk 2016), (Zouhar 2018), to name just a few.

<sup>12</sup> Wyatt’s definitions are phrased differently, but I believe that Definitions 3 and 4 capture the essence of Wyatt’s notions.

$\phi$  rather than  $\chi$  (o.t.b.e.) and the preference for doing  $\psi$  rather than  $\omega$  (o.t.b.e.) with respect to themselves.<sup>13</sup>

Take (2) again. Ann accepts the proposition *that the cake tastes good to Ann*, and Ben accepts the proposition *that the cake does not taste good to Ben*. Accordingly, Ann is expected to have a preference for eating the cake rather than not (o.t.b.e.), and Ben is expected to have a preference for not eating the cake rather than eating it (o.t.b.e.). The two preferences are type-noncotenable because no person could be in a position to have coherently, with respect to themselves, both the preference for eating the cake rather than not, and the preference for not eating the cake rather than eating it. Ann is not in a position to have the anonymized version of Ben's preference while retaining her original preference regarding the cake, and Ben is not in a position to have the anonymized version of Ann's preference while retaining his original preference regarding the cake. Consequently, Ann and Ben disagree on whether the cake in question is tasty or not.<sup>14</sup>

The above considerations suggest that people are in a position to express disagreements in judge-specific conversations. Two people may be said to disagree with one another even though they express mutually compatible propositions. It seems that the disagreement between them occurs at some other level than the propositional level. Disagreement is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and confining it to one type is too restrictive.<sup>15</sup> If indexical contextualism is complemented with the idea of the type-noncotenability of preferences or some other idea along similar lines, it could be in a position to cope successfully with disagreements about personal tastes. Accordingly, it does not seem correct to cast doubt on the prospects of indexical contextualism to explain disagreements about taste by pointing out that it treats ut-

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<sup>13</sup> There are similar notions – not defined in terms of preferences – that stem from Stevenson's classical idea of disagreement in attitude (see Stevenson 1944: 2–3); see, most notably, (MacFarlane 2014: 123), who discusses the notion of disagreement as preclusion of joint satisfaction where satisfying one attitude precludes satisfying some other attitude. See also the discussion regarding disagreements in the wide sense in (Worsnip 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Although Wyatt's notion of type-noncotenability is defined in terms of preferences and anonymized preferences, I take it that some other notions could be used to the same effect. Instead of preferences, one could consider desires or commitments (to act in a certain way), for example.

<sup>15</sup> In saying so, I do not mean to suggest that there could not exist a sufficiently general notion of disagreement that would bring both the notion contained in Definition 1 and the notion contained in Definition 3 under one genus. Given the attempts to define the notion of minimal disagreement, there could be such a notion; see (Baker 2014), (Belleri, Palmira 2013), (Coliva, Moruzzi 2014), and (Zeman 2020).

terances of judge-non-specific taste sentences as tantamount to utterances of judge-specific taste sentences.

### 3. INDEXICAL SENTENCES AND DISAGREEMENT

People may disagree about all kinds of issues. In doing so, it is not exceptional for them to utter sentences that express mutually compatible propositions. This also holds outside the realm of conversations regarding matters of personal taste. We sometimes express disagreements with our fellows by uttering indexical sentences that express propositions (relative to the relevant contexts of use) that are perfectly coherent with our fellows' propositions. I am going to make a brief digression to illustrate this point. This digression is not a mere redundant addition to the main line of argumentation, though. Recall that an important part of the anti-indexical-contextualist campaign was based on the idea that judge-specific conversations like those in (2) and (3) cannot be used to express disagreements about taste because we cannot express disagreements in conversations like those in (4), where the speakers utter plain indexical sentences. Now, even if we admit that the conversation in (4) is not cut out for expressing disagreement, there are similar dialogues that are open to this possibility.

First of all, notice that the following conversations are naturally interpreted as expressing disagreements. Suppose Ann and Ben face a typical trolley situation in which a runaway train is about to hit five people tied to the track unless something unexpected happens. An option for Ann and Ben is to push a large and heavy man overlooking the situation from the bridge over the railing. The following discussion occurs:

- (12)            Ann: I don't find the guy heavy enough to stop the train.  
                   Ben: I disagree. He seems to me heavy enough to do the job.  
                               Let's push him.

Similarly, imagine a situation in which Ann, Ben, and Cal are extremely bad mathematicians. The following conversation takes place:

- (13)            Cal: Hey guys! Don't you know by chance how much two plus  
                               two is?  
                   Ann: It seems to me that it's five.  
                   Ben: I don't think so. Five is too much. I think it's three.

Admittedly, Ben does not reject what Ann literally says, namely that she does not find the guy heavy enough and that five seems to her to be the correct sum. Yet, he obviously does disagree with her. Some might argue that we do have disagreements in (12) and (13) but that they are not due to the literal contents of Ann's and Ben's utterances. Ben actually disagrees about whether the guy is heavy enough rather than whether Ann does find him heavy enough. And he also disagrees about whether two plus two is five rather than about whether it seems to Ann that two plus two is five. If interpreted along these lines, the indexical elements do not enter the explanation of the disagreements. Admittedly, when we accept this kind of explanation, we seem to have a situation in which the disagreements are explained in terms of something other than the semantically expressed contents. The contents Ann and Ben express in (12) and (13) are compatible.

Take another kind of example. It seems plausible that the following conversations could be interpreted as containing disagreements:

- (14)        Ann: *Some Like It Hot* is my favorite movie.  
               Ben: *Some Like It Hot* isn't my favorite movie.
- (15)        Ann: *Some Like It Hot* is my favorite movie.  
               Ben: My favorite movie is *The Seventh Seal*.

The possibility that Ann and Ben could be plausibly pictured as disagreeing with one another can be demonstrated by the fact that, upon recording the conversations, Cal could make a correct report along the following lines:

- (16)        Ann and Ben disagree because they have different favorite movies.  
               Ann and Ben disagree regarding their favorite movies.  
               Etc.

Analogously, Cal could plausibly ask Ben whether he disagrees with Ann about his favorite movie. It seems probable that Ben would respond in the positive.

Now it could be argued that even though the conversations in (12) through (15) were disagreements, the same could not be said about (4). Why is this so? All the claims contained in (4) and (12) through (15) are indexical. There seems to be a natural explanation for the difference between the claims. Notice that considering their respective contexts of utterance, Ann's and Ben's claims in (4) are about different matters. Ann's assertion concerns Ann, and Ben's concerns Ben. Ann says about herself that she is hungry, and Ben says about himself that he is not. Strictly speaking, there is no common subject matter for

both assertions to be about. Thus, there is nothing Ann and Ben could disagree about in (4). Based on this, Cal is not in a position to make a report on the conversation along the same lines as he did in (16).

This is not the case regarding (14), for example. Both Ann and Ben say something about the movie *Some Like It Hot*. Assessed from Ann's viewpoint, it is her favorite movie, but assessed from Ben's viewpoint, it is not his favorite movie. The disagreement thus focuses on the same movie and the different attitudes Ann and Ben have toward it. The dialogue in (15) is a bit different because they're speaking about different movies. Nevertheless, Ann and Ben could be interpreted as saying something about the notion of a favorite movie. Viewed from Ann's perspective, the notion depicts *Some Like It Hot*; viewed from Ben's perspective, it depicts *The Seventh Seal*. The disagreement between them is thus about which movie to take as favored, meaning that there is a common ground on which the disagreement can be based.

Let us sum up. The anti-indexical-contextualist argument summarized in Section 1 suggests, among other things, that indexical contextualism fails because it treats the conversation in (1) as if it resembled the one in (4). This is because the theory has it that (1) is similar to (2) and (3), both of which belong to the same category as (4) – or so the argument suggests. The above considerations imply, however, that even if we treated (1) in the same way as (2) and (3), we could still preserve the relevant differences between (1) and (4).

#### 4. DUAL-PROPOSITION INDEXICAL CONTEXTUALISM

Regardless of what has been said in Sections 2 and 3, there are indexical contextualists who take seriously the anti-indexical-contextualist argument from Section 1. They admit that disagreements between speakers arise because they either accept incompatible propositions or adopt incompatible (doxastic) attitudes towards the same proposition. Based on this, they strive to defend indexical contextualism by introducing other propositional levels in terms of which the disagreements could be explained.

Being indexical-contextualist, the theories take it that Ann's utterance in (1) semantically expresses the proposition *that this cake is tasty to Ann*, and Ben's semantically expresses the proposition *that this cake is not tasty to Ben*. Apart from these propositions, both are said to communicate some other propositions as well. Typically, the theories assume that there is some pragmatic mechanism or other that is responsible for deriving the additional propositions. Theories of this kind are thus dual-proposition indexical-contextualist theories. A number of philosophers have recently defended them.

Dan López de Sa proposed a *presuppositional account*, according to which Ann communicates the semantically expressed proposition *that this cake is tasty to Ann* and triggers the proposition *that Ann and Ben share the same standards of taste when it comes to the cake*.<sup>16</sup> The latter proposition is called a *presupposition of commonality*. Ben also communicates the semantically expressed proposition *that this cake is not tasty to Ben* and triggers the same presupposition. The source of the disagreement between them is obvious. If they both presuppose sharing the same standards of taste regarding the cake, they have to contradict one another because Ann's standards oppose Ben's, contrary to the presupposition.

Julia Zakkou provided a different explanation along similar lines.<sup>17</sup> According to her *superiority account*, Ann communicates the above semantically expressed proposition and the superiority proposition *that Ann's standards of taste are the best*. Similarly, apart from communicating his semantically expressed proposition, Ben communicates another superiority proposition, namely *that Ben's standards of taste are the best*. I should add that the standards of taste are not individuated in terms of the judges or speakers but in terms of their contents (see Zakkou 2019c: 111). Ann's standards of taste are tantamount to the standards according to which the cake is tasty, and Ben's standards are tantamount to the standards according to which the cake is not tasty. The above superiority propositions are thus to be understood along these lines. Nevertheless, the explanation of the disagreement between Ann and Ben is obvious. Since their standards of taste differ and each of them treats their respective standards as the best, Ann contradicts Ben, and vice versa.

According to the *metalinguistic account* that is endorsed by several authors, utterances about matters of personal taste tell us something about the context in which the speakers produced their utterances.<sup>18</sup> Based on this, apart from expressing the proposition *that this cake is tasty to Ann*, Ann also makes a metalinguistic suggestion about the context in which she finds herself – call it C – by communicating the proposition *that “tasty” ought to apply to the cake in C*. Similarly, apart from expressing the proposition *that this cake is not tasty to Ben*, Ben communicates the metalinguistic proposition *that “tasty”*

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<sup>16</sup> See, in particular, (López de Sa 2007, 2008, 2015, 2017). For some criticism regarding the presuppositional account, see (Baker 2012), (Berškýté 2021), (Egan 2014), (Marques, García-Carpintero 2014), and (Zakkou 2019c: 97–105). See (Parsons 2013) for another version of the presuppositional account.

<sup>17</sup> See (Zakkou 2019a, b, c).

<sup>18</sup> See, most notably, (Barker 2013), (Mankowitz 2021), (Plunkett 2015), (Plunkett, Sundell 2013), (Soria Ruiz 2023), (Sundell 2011, 2016, 2017), and (Umbach 2016). For some criticism regarding the metalinguistic account, see (Egan 2014), (Karczewska 2016), (Marques 2017), and (Zakkou 2019c: 97–105).

*ought not to apply to the cake in C*. Although the semantically expressed propositions are perfectly compatible, the metalinguistic propositions contradict each other. The disagreement between Ann and Ben is thus explained.

The final example of dual-proposition indexical-contextualism is Daniel Gutzmann's *deontic force account*.<sup>19</sup> Utterances of taste sentences like those in (1) have both truth-conditional content and use-conditional content, the latter being normative. As its truth-conditional content, Ann's utterance in (1) expresses the proposition *that this cake is tasty to Ann*, and Ben's utterance expresses the proposition *that this cake is not tasty to Ben*. The use-conditional content of Ann's utterance is tantamount to the proposition *that this cake is tasty to Ann iff the cake shall count as tasty in C* (where *C* is the context of utterance); Ben's is tantamount to the proposition *that this cake is not tasty to Ben iff the cake shall not count as tasty in C*. Now, given these two kinds of content, Ann's utterance entails the proposition (via *Modus Ponens*) *that the cake shall count as tasty in C*, and Ben's utterance entails the proposition *that the cake shall not count as tasty in C*. Admittedly, these two propositions are incompatible, therefore we have a neat explanation of the disagreement between Ann and Ben.

Gutzmann's approach differs from the other approaches in one important respect. It seems that, unlike the other accounts mentioned above, Gutzmann's theory is not vulnerable to the problem I am going to discuss. Although all these accounts are designed to meet our disagreement intuitions regarding judge-non-specific conversations, neither the presuppositional account nor the superiority account nor the metalinguistic account is in a position to do justice to our disagreement intuitions regarding judge-specific conversations. Thus, these theories seem to have rather limited explanatory power. Gutzmann's theory appears to be more accurate in this respect.<sup>20</sup>

Take the superiority account, which is claimed to explain primarily auto-centric utterances of sentences about personal taste such as (17):

(17) This cake is tasty.

An autocentric utterance of (17) is used to communicate both the semantically expressed proposition and the superiority proposition. However, there are

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<sup>19</sup> See (Gutzmann 2016). For some criticism regarding the deontic force account, see (Zouhar 2019, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> I do not wish to imply that one could not enrich the dual-proposition theories with some other theoretical resources to explain disagreements about matters of personal taste in judge-specific conversations. Apparently, one could do so. What I merely criticize is that the existent theoretical resources of the theories do not suffice to do the job.

taste sentences that have a more complicated form than “*T* is tasty,” and there are also other uses of taste sentences than autocentric uses. First of all, notice that exocentric utterances are excluded from the scope of Zakkou’s superiority account (see Zakkou 2019c: 124). This is plausible. Suppose that, by way of commenting on how her cat enjoys its food, the speaker utters (18):

(18) This cat food is delicious.

It seems unintuitive to claim that the speaker would intend to communicate the proposition *that the cat’s standards of taste are the best over and above the semantically expressed proposition that the cat food is delicious for the cat*. Exocentric utterances are not suitable for communicating superiority propositions. Analogously, if the speaker utters (19), she probably intends to just make a modest claim about her individual feelings regarding the cake without suggesting that her standards of taste are the best:

(19) This cake tastes good to me.

It seems that utterances of (19) and other judge-specific sentences about personal taste are not suitable for communicating superiority propositions either. This intuition could be strengthened by the acceptability of the following claim:

(20) This cake tastes good to me. Moreover, my tastes are more refined than yours, and that is why my view is superior.

The occurrence of “moreover” indicates that a novel piece of information is added in the second sentence in (20). Since the part of the second sentence is used to express what could be the speaker’s superiority proposition, an utterance of the first sentence of (20) does not communicate it. Admittedly, (20) would be unacceptable if the first sentence could be used to communicate such a proposition.

One could object that even though utterances of (20) are felicitous, there surely are situations in which speakers do intend to communicate superiority propositions by uttering judge-specific taste sentences like (19). For example, if such an utterance is made by a renowned cake expert who just out of mere modesty utters (19) instead of (17), we could imagine that, besides the semantically expressed proposition, she also communicates a superiority proposition about her standards of taste being the best. In general, in the case of expert utterances of (19) and other judge-specific sentences about personal taste, we should be prepared to acknowledge that the speakers intend to

communicate the superiority of their standards of taste. Nevertheless, if one communicates a superiority proposition in this kind of case, one does so due to one's social status rather than ordinary mechanisms that are typically responsible for deriving the superiority propositions communicated by utterances of judge-non-specific taste sentences.

Although I admit that there could be situations in which utterances of judge-specific sentences about personal taste are used to communicate superiority propositions about the respective speakers' standards of taste, it is important that there are situations in which this is not the case. If a speaker makes an utterance of (19), in many cases she is merely describing her tastes regarding the cake and does not care about the wider social impact of her assertion.

Now, the very possibility of uttering (19) without communicating a superiority proposition implies that the superiority account is not in a position to explain the disagreement in judge-specific conversations like (2) and (3). Take the situation envisioned in Section 2, in which the conversation in (2) takes place. Moreover, suppose that by manifesting a different view on the cake from Ann, Ben intends to disagree with Ann. In asserting her line from the dialogue, Ann expresses the proposition *that this cake tastes good to Ann* but cannot be said to communicate the proposition regarding the superiority of her taste standards. Ben responds by expressing the proposition that *this cake does not taste good to Ben*, again without communicating the corresponding superiority proposition. Given that the situation contains an instance of disagreement between Ann and Ben and that the superiority account explains disagreements about personal taste in terms of superiority propositions, this account has no theoretical resources to explain this kind of disagreement where no superiority propositions are communicated. Thus, it cannot do justice to our disagreement intuitions regarding judge-specific conversations.

The same line of reasoning applies to the presuppositional account and the metalinguistic account. It is rather natural for a speaker to utter (19) without triggering the presupposition that she and her interlocutor's standards of taste are alike when it comes to the cake. This is because the following claims are acceptable:

- (21) I know that you dislike this cake, but it tastes good to me.
- (22) I don't care about your tastes regarding this cake, but it tastes good to me.

Based on this, if the dialogue in (2) takes place, Ann can be supposed to express the proposition that *this cake tastes good to Ann*, and Ben can be supposed to

express the proposition that *this cake does not taste good to Ben*, while both fail to trigger the presupposition of commonality. And if Ben intends to disagree with Ann in the conversation, we are not in a position to explain this by the resources the presuppositional theory provides.

Analogously, it is rather natural for a speaker to utter (19) without intending to make a general suggestion to the effect that she and her interlocutor find themselves in a context in which “tasty” (or “taste good”) ought to apply to the cake in question. The following claim appears to be in order (although it is rather clumsy):

- (23) This cake tastes good to me but I don’t mean to suggest that it ought to be tasty to other people too.

If Ann expresses the proposition that *this cake tastes good to Ann* by her line in (2), and Ben expresses the proposition that *this cake does not taste good to Ben*, while neither of them intends to assert anything about the context in which they find themselves, we cannot invoke the metalinguistic account to explain this kind of disagreement.

Gutzmann’s deontic force approach provides a different treatment than the above accounts. Speaking about utterances of judge-specific taste sentences, he suggests that “it seems to be the case that the deontic force of the use-conditional dimension of [predicates of personal taste] is always active” (Gutzmann 2016: 41). Gutzmann ascribes truth-conditional content and use-conditional content to sentences containing predicates of personal taste at the level of their meanings, therefore they always express both kinds of content. The theory thus has it that Ann’s utterance of (19) in a particular context *C* succeeds to express both the truth-conditional content, namely the proposition that *this cake tastes good to Ann*, and the use-conditional content, i.e., the proposition that *this cake tastes good to Ann iff the cake shall count as tasty in C*. Thus, Gutzmann is in a position to successfully predict that Ann and Ben disagree in judge-specific conversations because, at the level of the use-conditional contents, Ann’s claim suggests that the cake shall count as tasty in the context in which they find themselves, while Ben’s response suggests otherwise.

There is a price to be paid for this success, however. After all, the idea that the use-conditional content of (19) is deontic in the above sense does not seem plausible. Gutzmann suggests that all utterances of (19) (and other judge-specific taste sentences) express use-conditional kind of content. As we have seen, though, there should be room left for situations in which speakers intend to speak merely for themselves and do not wish to imply anything regarding what

others are expected to do or like because, in many situations, speakers could utter (23) and similar claims without saying anything inappropriate. This means that these speakers do not intend to communicate the use-conditional content Gutzmann's theory predicts they communicate whenever speakers utter judge-specific taste sentences.

Summing up, Gutzmann's theory is inadequate, but for a different reason than the other dual-proposition indexical-contextualist theories. The problem is that while the other theories predict that utterances of judge-specific taste sentences never express additional propositional content over and above the semantically expressed propositions, Gutzmann's theory predicts that utterances always express such additional content. Neither option fits our pre-theoretical expectations.

## CONCLUSION

The above considerations show that both hypotheses proposed in Section 1 are justified. Regarding Hypothesis 1, we have seen that there are conversations about matters of personal taste in which the speakers utter judge-specific taste sentences yet express disagreements about the objects of taste in question with their interlocutors. They thus disagree with one another but do so by expressing compatible propositions. Based on this, we need a notion of disagreement that does not consist in assuming that one speaker disagrees with another speaker, provided they accept incompatible propositions or have incompatible doxastic attitudes towards the same proposition. Regarding Hypothesis 2, we have seen that dual-proposition indexical-contextualist theories are not in a position to deal with disagreements between speakers uttering judge-specific taste sentences: they are primarily designed to explain disagreements in judge-non-specific conversations. However, since disagreements of the former kind also call for an explanation, dual-proposition indexical-contextualist theories have severely limited explanatory power.

Given these results, it seems that another type of approach would be welcome. Admittedly, the line of argumentation developed in this paper does not undermine indexical contextualism in general. It merely rejects one particular strand within this broadly conceived paradigm. Other possibilities are available, according to which disagreements about taste could be explained on grounds other than the incompatibility of propositions. The preference model of taste disagreements based on the idea of type-noncotenability, for example, could be one such option (see Section 3). Be that as it may, indexical contextu-

alism can still be regarded as an attractive doctrine that could be tuned to provide adequate explanations of disagreements about matters of personal taste.

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