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## ILLOCUTIONARY DISAGREEMENT IN THE AESTHETIC REALM\*\*

### Abstract

A recent view about disagreement (Karczevska 2021) takes it to consist in the tension arising from proposals and refusals of these proposals to impose certain commitments on the interlocutors in a conversation. This view has been proposed with the aim of solving the problem that “faultless disagreement” – a situation in which two interlocutors are intuited to be both in disagreement and not at fault – poses for contextualism about predicates of taste.

In this paper, I consider whether this view applies equally well to disagreements involving aesthetic adjectives. I show, first, that it applies quite straightforwardly to predicates like “beautiful,” which presumably generate faultless disagreement. However, aesthetic adjectives like “beautiful” don’t exhaust the aesthetic sphere. A term like “balanced,” for example, while still perspectival, is said to have a more “objective” feel and usually doesn’t generate faultless disagreement: when the novice and the expert disagree on using such a term, we take it that the expert is right and the novice is wrong. I argue that Karczevska’s view has trouble explaining this difference in the profile of the two types of aesthetic predicates vis-à-vis the generation of disagreement. I also consider possible ways of coping with this problem, but I then reject them and propose a different one that is suitable for most views in the debate.

*Keywords:* predicates of taste, aesthetic adjectives, faultless disagreement, illocutionary disagreement, evaluations

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\*\* I thank audiences at the *XIV Inter-University Workshop on Mind, Art and Morality* (“Aesthetic Normativity”), University of Murcia, 5–6.05.2022 and at the *SIFA Midterm Conference* (“Truth in Evaluation”), University of Sassari, 26–28.09.2022 for their questions, comments, and suggestions. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers of this journal for their feedback. Heartfelt thanks to Natalia Karczevska for continuous discussion, for carefully reading the paper, and for putting together this topic collection. I acknowledge the financial help of an OPUS 17 grant (UMO-2019/33/B/HS1/01269) from the National Science Centre, Poland.



There is little doubt that we disagree with each other; we do so in many ways and about lots of issues. For example, we disagree about the age of the Earth, about which candidates to elect, or about the best way to raise our children. Perhaps with less dramatic consequences, we also disagree about books being good, paintings beautiful, or dishes tasty.

The natural language expressions we use in relation to the latter issues are known in the literature as *perspectival expressions* – expressions for the interpretation of which the provision of a perspective (standard, judge, experiencer, etc.) is required. Among the expressions that have been said to belong to this class are thus predicates of taste (“tasty,” “disgusting,” “fun,” “boring”), aesthetic adjectives (“beautiful,” “ugly,” “sublime,” “balanced”), and even moral terms (“good,” “bad,” “ought to”). Additionally, epistemic terms (words like “know,” “justified,” and the like) have also been said to be perspectival, together with epistemic modals (words like “might” or “must”) and gradable adjectives (“rich,” “tall,” etc.). The sense of *perspective* associated with each of these words is of course different (for example, different types of standards for moral, aesthetic, and epistemic terms), but the need for a perspective is a widely accepted fact about the interpretation of such expressions.

The fact that such expressions are perspectival, yet we disagree about the issues we use them in relation to, has led to a puzzle. On the face of it, using perspectival expressions correctly doesn’t seem to require much: presumably, all that is needed is the possession of the relevant experiences (say, having a pleasurable gustatory experience when tasting a certain dish in order to say that it’s tasty) or beliefs (say, having information that doesn’t rule out a certain possibility, in order to say that something might be the case). Thus, the disagreements we have when using these expressions are most of the time faultless. But faultlessness is at odds with disagreement: at least under a very natural understanding of the latter, two people who disagree can’t both be right. This phenomenon of “faultless disagreement” has been taken to create problems for at least some semantic views about the perspectival expressions in question, and the proponents of these views have been pressed hard to account for it. There are many ways of doing so in current literature, and each depends on one’s semantic proclivities, one’s view on disagreement, and one’s view of faultlessness. A recent account, devised precisely with the aim of solving the problem raised by “faultless disagreement” for *contextualism* – that of Natalia Karczewska (2021) – takes disagreement to consist in the tension arising from proposals and refusals of these proposals to impose certain commitments on the interlocutors in a conversation. The construal of disagreement as illocutionary, Karczewska argues, is a more straightforward solution to the problem than those put forward by both simple and other complex contextualist views:

in contrast to the simple views, Karczewska's version of contextualism doesn't leave out cases that intuitively count as disagreement; in contrast to some of the complex contextualist views, it has less implausible theoretical postulates.

In this paper, I consider whether Karczewska's view applies equally well to disagreements involving aesthetic adjectives as it does to those involving predicates of personal taste. I show, first, that it does apply quite straightforwardly to predicates like "beautiful" that presumably generate faultless disagreement. However, aesthetic adjectives like "beautiful" don't exhaust the aesthetic sphere. A term like "balanced," for example, while still perspectival, is said to have a more "objective" feel, in that its use involves more than merely a subjective preference. Presumably, such aesthetic adjectives don't generate faultless disagreements – or at least not in most situations. One way to see this is to consider disagreements between experts and novices: when a novice and an expert disagree, we (usually) take it that the expert is right and the novice wrong. I argue that Karczewska's view has trouble explaining this difference in the profile of the two types of aesthetic predicates vis-à-vis the generation of disagreement. I also consider possible ways of coping with the problem, but I then reject them and propose a different one. Structure-wise, the paper is divided into four sections: Section 1, where I provide a bit more background on the debate at stake and clarify the terms involved; Section 2, where I give a more detailed description of Karczewska's view; Section 3, where I lay out the objection mentioned above; and Section 4, where I search for possible answers to it within the illocutionary framework. The result is a possible way to account for the cases I focus on that is available not only to Karczewska or other contextualists, but (potentially) to all views in the debate.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTUALISM, RELATIVISM, AND FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

I started this paper with the remark that predicates of taste, aesthetic adjectives, and the other terms mentioned are perspectival in the sense that the provision of a perspective (standard, judge, experiencer, etc. – the differences between these won't matter in what follows) is required for their semantic interpretation. Another notable feature of these expressions, closely related to their perspectivality, is that they exhibit a certain kind of context-sensitivity. The following sentence is intuitively true in a context in which the speaker likes the dish, but false in one in which the speaker doesn't like it:

- (1) Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty.

Whatever explains this difference in (intuitive) truth-value, it is a natural thought that it has to be somehow connected with the difference in the two standards of taste embraced.

There are many views on the market that aim to explain the kind of context-sensitivity illustrated above. Two of these are relevant to the main issue discussed in this paper and concern the *semantic content* of utterances of sentences like (1). The differences between them lie in the types of contents they postulate for such utterances and, correspondingly, in the types and number of parameters they allow in the circumstances of evaluation (a Kaplanian term designating “both actual and counterfactual situations with respect to which it is appropriate to ask for the extensions of a given well-formed expression” (Kaplan 1989: 502); much of the discussion is conducted in the Kaplanian framework). Thus, according to *contextualism*,<sup>1</sup> contents of utterances are standard-specific, and consequently there is no need for standards in the circumstances of evaluation. The semantic content of (1) is

Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty for  $x$ ,

where “ $x$ ” is a variable for the relevant standard that, when not made explicit (as in the sentence “Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty for John,” for example), is automatically supplied by the context of utterance. According to the rival view, namely *relativism*,<sup>2</sup> contents of utterances are standard-neutral, and standards are part of the circumstances of evaluation. The semantic content of (1) is

Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty.

As mentioned above, relativism (in this case, about predicates of taste) postulates a standard (of taste) in the circumstances of evaluation besides the more classic ones (possible world and time), whereas contextualism does not.

The debate between the two views succinctly described above has been going on for quite a while and is still in full swing. One of the main arguments in this debate (raised by relativists against contextualism) is precisely the one from faultless disagreement – the phenomenon I mentioned at the outset as

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<sup>1</sup> Representative works for this view about various expressions are (Dreier 1990), (DeRose 1992), (Stojanovic 2007), (Glanzberg 2007), (von Fintel and Gillies 2008), (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009), (Schaffer 2011), (Huvenes 2012), (Marques and García-Carpintero 2014), (López de Sa 2015), (Silk 2016), (Zakkou 2019), etc.

<sup>2</sup> Representative works for this view about various expressions are (Kölbel 2004a, b, 2009), (Kompa 2005), (Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson 2005), (Laserson 2005, 2016), (Recanati 2007), (Brogaard 2008), (MacFarlane 2009, 2014), (Beddor and Egan 2018), etc.

leading to a puzzle for certain semantic views. To get a better grip on it, consider the following exchange involving utterances of (1) and its negation:

- Foodie 1: Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty.  
Foodie 2: No, they are not! They're disgusting.

When encountering this exchange, one supposedly has two intuitions: first, the intuition that Foodie 1 and Foodie 2 disagree (supported by the presence of "No" at the beginning of Foodie 2's utterance); second, the intuition that neither Foodie 1 nor Foodie 2 is at fault in uttering the sentences they utter. Reflecting these intuitions, the following definition has been proposed:

A faultless disagreement is a situation where there is a thinker A, a thinker B, and a proposition (a content of judgment)  $p$  such that (a) A believes (judges) that  $p$  and B believes (judges) that not- $p$ ; (b) neither A nor B has made a mistake (is at fault). (Kölbel 2004a: 53–54)

Two things should be remarked upon in relation to this definition: that it takes disagreement to be doxastic (the contents of judgments are propositions) and involving contradictory contents ( $p$  and not- $p$ ), and that the notion of fault employed is connected to truth – one is at fault when one says something false (this is not explicit in the definition's clauses, but it follows from the way of understanding judgment). The argument against contextualism has simply been that while it has no problem with faultlessness, it cannot account for disagreement because it postulates a type of semantic content for utterances that doesn't yield contradictory contents for utterances in exchanges like the one above. So, if one sticks with the definition given, disagreement is not accounted for by contextualism.

There have been many contextualist answers to this argument (see Khoo 2017 or Zeman 2017 for some of these) – including ones that shy away from construing disagreement as involving contradictory contents. Many of the answers given deserve full engagement; however, as already mentioned, this paper is concerned only with assessing one such answer that takes disagreement to be illocutionary, to which I now turn.

## 2. EVALUATIONS AS SPEECH ACTS AND ILLOCUTIONARY DISAGREEMENT

The idea that speech acts are essentially connected to the commitments their authors incur has been present since the framework was proposed (see, e.g., Austin 1962). It is thus very common in the speech acts literature to understand speech acts as giving rise to commitments. And this sounds intuitive, too. If I promise you something, I commit to bringing about what I promised. If I order you to do something, I commit to holding you responsible if you don't comply. And so on.

The idea is at home with assertions, too. One famous adage has it that "assertion aims at truth."<sup>3</sup> Understood in commitment terms, this means that in asserting something I commit to its truth. There are many ways in which this idea has been unpacked, and here is one. Largely following Robert Brandom (1983), John MacFarlane lists the following commitments that a subject incurs when making an assertion:

- (W) Commitment to withdraw the assertion if and when it is shown to have been untrue.
- (J) Commitment to justify the assertion (provide grounds for its truth) if and when it is appropriately challenged.
- (R) Commitment to be held responsible if someone else acts on or reasons from what is asserted, and it proves to have been untrue. (MacFarlane 2005: 334)

Another familiar idea in connection to assertions is that in making them speakers aim to introduce certain contents to the common ground. This latter notion, prominent in the work of Robert Stalnaker (1978), is meant to characterize the conversational dynamic in any given exchange. Seen in this way, an assertion is a proposal to introduce a certain content into the common ground, and a speaker succeeds in doing so if their interlocutors don't object. So, not only do speakers incur the commitments listed above when making an assertion, but they are also engaged in a dynamic of proposals and refusals to in-

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<sup>3</sup>This is an idea that can be found in philosophy at large; for some of its more contemporary expressions, see (Williams 1966) and (Dummett 1973). I hasten to stress that I'm not here intending to defend the idea that truth is the *norm* of assertion; the claim is only used as a means to introduce the idea of commitments presented below.

roduce contents in the common ground. The framework can be extended to speech acts other than assertion that have different commitments.

The view under scrutiny in this paper can be seen as an extension of this framework and consists in the conjunction of the two ideas spelled out above. The core claim that lies behind Karczewska's idea of illocutionary disagreement is that the expressions we use to evaluate parts of the world around us – e.g., predicates of taste – are used to make a certain specific type of speech act: *evaluations*. Karczewska takes evaluations to be a genuine, *sui generis* type of speech act – on a par with assertions, promises, commands, and so on – that is describable by the seven features John Searle and Daniel Vanderveken (1985) use to characterize speech acts. In uttering a sentence containing a predicate of taste, one produces an act of assertion, but also an act of evaluation. The assertion one makes has a contextualist content – that is, a content that features a standard of taste. For example, when someone utters the sentence “Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty,” they express the content that Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty for themselves, or for a relevant group/person in that context. The act of evaluation one produces in uttering the same sentence is one of *praising* Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce. Now, as with assertions, in making an act of evaluation one intends to influence the common ground in a certain way, namely by attempting to impose certain commitments on the interlocutors. These are taken by Karczewska to be commitments to making certain propositions true. In uttering a sentence like the one above, one attempts to impose these commitments by proposing that certain propositions be added to the common ground and taken as true – that is, by assuring that all the interlocutors will strive to make the said propositions true. These propositions are meant to “guide coordinated action in relation to Brussels sprouts [with béchamel sauce]” (Karczewska 2021: 544) and are of the following kind: that the interlocutors will have Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce for dinner on some occasion; that it is understandable that the speaker will make similar utterances in the future; that the speaker will not refuse to eat Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce when the next occasion arises, etc.

Now, in disagreeing about matters of taste, what happens is that there is a conflict as to whether the said propositions should enter the common ground. For example, the exchange between Foodie 1 and Foodie 2 presented in the previous section should be interpreted according to Karczewska's view as Foodie 1 praising the food and Foodie 2 disapproving of it (in uttering “disgusting” one makes a negative evaluation). In the terms defined above, this amounts to Foodie 1 proposing that certain propositions (similar to those mentioned) enter the common ground and to Foodie 2 refusing that proposal. This is how the intuition of disagreement in such exchanges is accounted for. The dis-

agreement is *illocutionary* because it arises from proposals of commitments and refusals of these proposals that follow one's production of certain types of speech acts. The intuition of faultlessness, on the other hand, is accounted for at the level of assertions: since each interlocutor speaks their mind about what they find tasty, they are not at fault. This is captured in the theory by making the contents of the relevant assertions contextualist, accompanied by the claim that each interlocutor adopts the "right" standard in the context.

Although in her paper Karczewska focuses on predicates of taste, the view proposed is meant to apply to a wider range of expressions – including aesthetic adjectives. I will get to discussing these shortly, but it would be useful at this point to have a summary of this view. Here are three theses that Karczewska (2021: 540) takes to describe it:

- (1) Evaluative expressions are systematically used to perform non-assertive acts of praise and disapproval over and above expressing the proposition that something is good or bad according to one's standard.
- (2) The intuition of disagreement can be plausibly explained by invoking the conflict between illocutions (illocutionary forces) – illocutionary disagreement.
- (3) The intuition of faultlessness is accounted for thanks to the semantic content postulated by contextualism.

And to have a clearer image of how this proposal handles faultless disagreement like the one exhibited by the exchange between Foodie 1 and Foodie 2, here is a representation of the contents of their utterances (I call the commitments incurred by making a speech act of evaluation, "IC," i.e., illocutionary content, in order to distinguish it from, "AC," i.e., assertoric content):

- Foodie 1: AC: Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty for Foodie 1.  
 IC: proposal to strive to make the following propositions true:  
 Foodie 1 and Foodie 2 will have Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce for dinner on some occasion; Foodie 1 will make similar utterances in the future; Foodie 1 will not refuse to eat Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce when the next occasion arises, etc.
- Foodie 2: AC: Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are not tasty for Foodie 2.  
 IC: refusal to strive to make the same propositions true.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, Foodie 2's refusal to strive to make some of the propositions listed true

### 3. ILLOCUTIONARY DISAGREEMENTS WITH AESTHETIC ADJECTIVES

We have seen how evaluatives work, illustrated with predicates of taste, and we have seen that Karczewska intends to apply the view to the entire evaluative sphere. It would be useful, though, to see in more detail how this view applies to aesthetic adjectives, which are the focus of this paper. On the face of it, there is no problem with applying theses (1)–(3) to such expressions. Take the term “beautiful,” for example. It strikes me as quite intuitive that “beautiful” is used to make evaluations: when saying “*Irreversible* is beautiful,” we offer praise to Gaspar Noé’s movie. Similarly with negative adjectives: when saying “*Irreversible* is hideous,” there is little doubt that we disapprove of the movie. Thesis (1), then, seems to hold for such terms.

If one agrees that “beautiful” and its negative counterparts are used to make speech acts of praise and disapproval, respectively, then the door to interpreting exchanges in which people disagree about aesthetic matters as illocutionary disagreements is wide open. In a disagreement like the following:

Artsy:        *Irreversible* is beautiful. The way the tension builds is remarkable.  
Sensitive:    No, it’s hideous! The prolonged rape scene is unbearable,

Artsy can be interpreted as attempting to impose certain commitments on Sensitive – to strive to make true propositions such as that they go see similar movies together in the future, that it is understandable that Artsy will make similar utterances in the future, that Artsy will not refuse to see the movie again when the next occasion arises, etc. – and Sensitive can be interpreted as refusing them. Thesis (2) thus applies. Finally, since the contents of the two utterances are contextualist – that is, they contain standards (so that, for example, Artsy asserts the proposition that *Irreversible* is beautiful to Artsy, and Sensitive asserts that it is hideous to Sensitive), and since they are each adopting the “right” standard in their context, Artsy and Sensitive are faultless. So, thesis (3) applies as well. Adding this all up, we get a nice treatment of faultless disagreement involving the term “beautiful.” As before, to have a clearer image of how this proposal handles faultless disagreement in relation to “beautiful,” here is a representation of the contents of the relevant parts of their utterances:

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might not have any effect: for example, Foodie 2 might have no power over what Foodie 1 utters in the future. However, the effects of Foodie 2’s refusal are evident when the proposition in question involves Foodie 2 in a certain way (as is the case with the proposition that Foodie 1 and Foodie 2 will have Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce for dinner on some occasion, for example).

- Artsy: AC: *Irreversible* is beautiful according to Artsy.  
 IC: proposal to strive to make the following propositions true:  
 Artsy and Sensitive will go to see similar movies together in the future; Artsy will make similar utterances in the future; Artsy will not refuse to see the movie again when the next occasion arises; etc.
- Sensitive: AC: *Irreversible* is not beautiful according to Sensitive.  
 IC: refusal to strive to make the same propositions true.

So far, so good – but trouble is in store. It has been claimed (Brogaard 2017, McNally and Stojanovic 2017, Berškýtė 2022) that there are certain aesthetic adjectives that, while still evaluative/perspectival, have a more “objective” feel and that their use doesn’t depend merely on one’s subjectivity. Thus, Berit Brogaard writes:

Aesthetic taste predicates are multiple and varied. While some *thin* aesthetic expressions connote only an evaluative component (e.g., “excellent,” “great”), many *thick* expressions connote both a descriptive and an evaluative component (e.g., “balanced,” “transgressive,” “delicate,” “insipid”). (Brogaard 2017: 129)<sup>5</sup>

There are many contexts in which such predicates can be used, including those in which the interlocutors disagree. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the problem posed by “balanced” and the like for Karczewska’s view is by imagining exchanges between movie critics and ordinary movie-consumers. What critics’ use of these predicates involves seems to be a more nuanced understanding of the matter at hand, a certain amount of aesthetic training, and (presumably) a wider set of cultural references. Consider thus the following exchange:

- Critic: *Irreversible* is balanced. The various parts sit together nicely.  
 Layperson: No, it’s very unbalanced! The prolonged rape scene takes the spotlight.

Critic and Layperson can be said to have a disagreement alright, but the intuition of faultlessness seems to be faltering. After all (we can assume), Critic has years of experience in evaluating movies, sees subtler things that laypeople such as Layperson miss, and (presumably) has a vaster array of cultural references. While critics can undoubtedly err, in most cases they don’t – or at least

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<sup>5</sup>In contrast to Brogaard, McNally and Stojanovic (2017) take adjectives pertaining to the *thick* camp to not be evaluative. I will come back to this point in section 4.

we take them not to, and so we are justified in trusting them. But, if so, the disagreement between Critic and Layperson is not faultless.<sup>6</sup>

The problem that Karczewska's view of disagreement has with this type of exchange involving aesthetic predicates like "balanced" is one of providing too much. In the previous exchange, Artsy and Sensitive come out as disagreeing in the theory, but they also come out as faultless. The reason for the latter is, of course, thesis (3): according to it, the intuition of faultlessness is to be accounted for by the semantic content of Artsy and Sensitive's respective utterances, which is contextualist, and by the fact that each of them accepts the "right" standard in the context. But the same holds for Critic and Layperson: contextualism applies to their utterances as well, and they are each embracing the "right" standard in their context, too. This makes them faultless. Yet, the intuition seems to be that their disagreement is not faultless: that Layperson is wrong and Critic right. Once again, and this time to have a clearer image of how the problem arises in relation to "balanced," here is a representation of the contents of the relevant parts of their utterances:

- Critic: AC: *Irreversible* is balanced according to Critic.  
 IC: proposal to strive to make the following propositions true: Critic and Layperson will go to see similar movies together in the future; Critic will make similar utterances in the future; Critic will not refuse to see the movie again when the next occasion arises; etc.<sup>7</sup>
- Layperson: AC: *Irreversible* is not balanced according to Layperson.  
 IC: refusal to strive to make the same propositions true.

Of course, "balanced" can be used in other types of exchanges that don't assume some hierarchy between the interlocutors or a more "objective" setting,

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<sup>6</sup> Brogaard presents the problem much more vividly: "The idea that the application conditions for thin, purely evaluative expressions are merely a matter of personal taste is not too offensive. However, applying thick expressions correctly seems to require competence and experience. If an experienced art appreciator claims that a certain composition was balanced, and her novice friend denies it, it is tempting to think that the art appreciator is more likely to be right than her novice friend. When the renowned art critic makes a fully informed aesthetic judgment about an artwork, this judgment is based on vast knowledge and experience" (2017: 129).

<sup>7</sup> Presumably, some of the propositions on this list should be different for "balanced" and "beautiful," otherwise the two predicates will end up being indistinguishable in terms of the commitments incurred. I am not sure how exactly this difference would be cashed out in Karczewska's framework; however, it is not an issue that affects the critical point I'm making, which is that, according to her view, the disagreement between Critic and Layperson comes out faultless.

as in the case above. For example, two laypeople could disagree about whether *Irreversible* is balanced or not. In this case, I would say that “balanced” is used in the same way as “beautiful” – that is, in a purely subjective way. In such cases, I take the disagreement to be faultless, therefore it does not pose any problem to Karczewska’s view. But, quite obviously, the fact that “balanced” can have such uses doesn’t mean it can’t have other more “objective” uses as well.

Second, critics quite often seem to disagree as well. Can a disagreement between two critics about whether *Irreversible* is balanced be faultless? Some people have thought that this can happen in other areas of expertise, e.g., wine tasting (Smith 2010). However, agreeing that it can won’t change the point I wish to make. Suppose that critics can disagree faultlessly. This shows that there are some matters that, no matter how “objective” they seem, are in fact not fully objective, and that disagreements about such matters are still different from disagreements about matters of fact. Again, and most importantly, the fact that (possibly rare) cases in which critics disagree faultlessly exist doesn’t preclude cases in which critics don’t disagree faultlessly, and neither does it preclude cases in which critics and laypeople disagree in the way I presented them above, i.e., also not faultlessly.

#### 4. FAULTLESS AND FAULTY COMMITMENTS

My objection to Karczewska has been that her view cannot account for disagreements in the aesthetic realm that are not faultless. Below, I consider several ways to respond to this objection, show that they don’t work, and then propose an amendment to the theory that I think has better chances of solving the problem.

One line of resistance is this.<sup>8</sup> I have said that both Critic and Layperson have each adopted the “right” standard in their context. But this could be denied. It could thus be retorted that Critic and Layperson come out as disagreeing faultlessly because I have not assigned their utterances the right content – that is, I have assigned contents that comprise the wrong individual standards. It is not each of their standards that should figure in the content of each of their utterances, but either Critic’s, Layperson’s, or that of a third relevant person *in both contents*. These are all cases in which at least one interlocutor

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<sup>8</sup>The considerations that follow are similar to the line of argumentation pursued by Brogaard (2017) against the contextualist – although the conclusion I reach is different from hers (she thinks that, due to the difficulty of finding a suitable standard, in the contextualist view utterances of lay people end up not expressing any proposition).

uses “balanced” exocentrically (i.e., from another person’s point of view – see Lasersohn 2005).

While such uses are surely possible (and maybe frequent), this doesn’t seem to be the case in the exchange put forward. First, it is unreasonable to claim that Critic adopts Layperson’s standard: with the exception of learning situations (ones in which Layperson becomes a novice in film theory and the like) in which the pedagogic process requires them to do that, there is no reason Critic should accept a lesser standard (they are the critic, after all). On the other hand, it is equally unreasonable to claim that Layperson adopts Critic’s standard, if for no other reason than Layperson being at a loss about Critic’s standard and about good standards in general (if they had this knowledge, then their status would be comparable with Critic’s). It is perhaps true that Layperson *should* adopt Critic’s standard – after all, it is the better standard to have when it comes to movies – but it doesn’t seem that Layperson *actually* uses “balanced” exocentrically in that way. Even if the situation is one of learning, it can be stipulated that the exchange takes place before Layperson has in fact learned something, and so they still take their own standard as relevant. Finally, can the dialogue be interpreted as both interlocutors adopting a third standard, different from both Critic’s and Layperson’s? Again, this is something that can easily happen, but it’s not likely in the situation given: who’s standard would that be? If it is of a person similar in status to Layperson, then the problem is not solved. If it is of a person comparable in status to Critic, then presumably Layperson has some knowledge that would make them (somewhat of) a connoisseur, and the debate would mirror one between critics that might be faultless.<sup>9</sup> Taking Critic and Layperson to use “balanced” exocentrically in the exchange at hand thus leads to no progress in solving the matter.<sup>10</sup>

Another line of responding to the objection is this: instead of assigning both Critic and Layperson an individual standard, I should have gone with a group standard. But which group is that? It cannot be the group made of Critic and their community, because Layperson is not a critic. It cannot be the group made of Layperson and their community, because Critic is not a layperson.

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<sup>9</sup> What about taking the third-person’s standard to be that of the assessor of the sentence – for example, the reader? (Thanks to Hanne Appelqvist for this suggestion.) This is an interesting reply, but one that ultimately only pushes the problem one step back. Similar questions arise: is the reader more like Critic or more like Layperson? Neither answer seems adequate. Besides, what if the reader sides with Layperson? This would not vindicate the intuition that Critic is (usually) right and Layperson wrong.

<sup>10</sup> If one feels that the exchange is in fact underdescribed in this respect and that the considerations above miss the mark, we can stipulate that the two uses are autocentric; in fact, this is the type of exchange Karczewska herself focuses on in her paper.

If we take them to belong to different groups, then the problem simply reappears. Could it be the standards of a different group, neither that of Critic's community nor that of Layperson's community, but to which somehow both belong? There doesn't seem to be such a group, given the difference in their status; or, if one could be found (say, a group of people born in the same city, assuming Critic and Layperson were born in the same city), it is irrelevant to the matter at hand (we are after aesthetic standards here, which presumably have to do with an individual's aesthetic sensibility, not with where they were born). Finally, could it simply be the group comprised only by the two of them? Presumably so, but the problem is that they do not share a standard (or not yet if the situation is one of learning). So, we are left without a plausible choice of standard here too. I thus conclude that taking a content-based route to account for the intuition that the disagreement between Critic and Layperson is not faultless leads nowhere.

One important reply that is available to Karczewska at this point in the dialectic should be mentioned here.<sup>11</sup> The reply is that aesthetic terms like "balanced" are not – perhaps despite appearances – evaluative, thus there is a strict division within the domain of aesthetic terms between these and truly evaluative predicates such as "beautiful." This would help Karczewska because it would exclude such expressions from the intended applications of her framework, and thus the problem I signal would not arise.

I don't think, however, that this reply works, for several reasons. First, there is considerable disagreement between authors working on aesthetic terms whether those like "balanced" are evaluative or not. I have already presented Brogaard's (2017) view when introducing such terms in section 3. Her view contrasts with, for example, Louise McNally and Isidora Stojanovic's (2017), for whom terms like "balanced" are not evaluative, even though they can figure in genuine aesthetic judgments. Their main argument against taking them to be evaluative is that there are uses of such terms that are neutral or purely descriptive. I don't think that this is enough to establish their non-evaluativity, but I agree that this is a route that Karczewska might take. Doing this, however, brings to the fore issues about the applicability of her framework – specifically, the criteria on the basis of which the range of applications is selected. One such criterion seems to be the possibility of faultless disagreement. Indeed, Karczewska's view is specifically designed to deal with this issue in the case of predicates of taste. It is then important to note that disagreement between experts involving "balanced" can be faultless, too – as can disagreement involving "tasty" and "beautiful." I have already mentioned the case of disagreement between wine connoisseurs from (Smith 2010), and we can zoom in on the

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<sup>11</sup> I thank both Sebastiano Moruzzi and an anonymous referee for providing this reply.

real-life case he presents: that between wine critics Robert Parker and Jancis Robinson about the 2003 Château Pavie from St. Emilion. While these two specialists have agreed in their verdicts for many years and for many wines, in this particular case a huge disagreement ensued, with each of them attacking the other for missing the obvious.<sup>12</sup> This shows (clearly, to my mind) not only that disagreement between experts is possible, but that it is faultless as well (what authority could be invoked to show that one of the experts is wrong?). A similar situation can be envisaged with respect to the type of aesthetic terms focused on here: two experts can disagree about whether *Irreversible* is balanced, and they can do so faultlessly. So, even though “balanced” and similar expressions possess the more “objective” feel I mentioned, they nevertheless remain perspectival and therefore the aesthetic judgments in which they figure (even if they are not proper evaluations, as McNally and Stojanovic think) include an element of subjectivity due to their contribution. But this raises the question of why terms like “balanced” are excluded from the range of Karczevska’s theory, while terms like “beautiful” and “tasty” (*all three* exhibiting faultless disagreement) are not.

The second reason this reply doesn’t work is that the objection to Karczevska’s view can be recast in terms that don’t require drawing a sharp distinction between evaluative and non-evaluative aesthetic terms. Filippo Ferrari (2016) has distinguished between *basic* and *refined* taste in relation to our gustatory experiences (the expressions employed when displaying a refined taste being quite similar to “balanced”) and argues that each of these is subject to different epistemic norms. However, Ferrari *doesn’t deny* that the expressions in question are all predicates of taste – that they are evaluative/perspectival. Doing so strikes me as quite a radical move, and one that would drastically limit the width of Karczevska’s theory.

Third and finally, let me note that in presenting the objection to her view I focused on different aesthetic expressions; however, the issue is actually not so much about *different types* of expressions behaving differently (“balanced” appearing both in disagreements that are faultless and in those that are not, while “beautiful” appears only in faultless disagreements) but rather about how *the same type* of expression behaves in different contexts. It is easy to imagine “beautiful” being employed in an exchange between two laypeople or two experts (where the disagreement is presumably faultless), but also in an exchange between a critic and a layperson (where the disagreement is not faultless, as in the case of “balanced”). Trying to use an even finer-grained criterion to distinguish between these two situations and applying the theory only

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<sup>12</sup> An account of the debate can be read here: <https://www.decanter.com/wine-news/parker-and-robinson-in-war-of-words-102172/>.

to certain *uses* of these expressions very likely leads to an ad-hoc partition (and possibly the dissolution) of what we take relatively well-rounded domains of discourse to be.

If the considerations in the previous paragraph are on the right track, and if the strategy of finding a different content that would not make the disagreement between Critic and Layperson faultless fails, there is the other side of the story that we can look into. Karczewska has taken the intuition of faultlessness to be accounted for by the semantic content of utterances. But what if we take it to be accounted for by the commitments that the interlocutors propose or refuse in a disagreement? (This is similar to the move Karczewska considers (2021: 551, fn. 22) on behalf of proponents of construing disagreement as a “clash of attitudes.”) In the remainder of the paper, I explore how this might work, focusing on the types of propositions that Karczewska uses in her theory.

As we saw in section 1, the commitments following the making of a speech act of evaluation that Karczewska postulates are to making various propositions true, such as (in the case of an utterance of “Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty”) that the interlocutors will have Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce for dinner on some further occasion, that it is understandable that the speaker will make similar utterances in the future, that the speaker will not refuse to eat Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce when the next occasion arises, etc. The first step towards the solution I propose is to note that certain social norms that are in place in various contexts could trump the commitments one incurs by merely uttering an evaluative (and thus by making a speech act of evaluation). If The Queen asks me whether Brussels sprouts with béchamel sauce are tasty and I reply affirmatively, it is not proper for me to form the commitment that I will invite The Queen for dinner. Something similar seems to happen (although with far less dramatic consequences) in situations like those in which the disagreement between Critic and Layperson takes place. Given Critic’s expertise, Layperson should defer to them when it comes to evaluating movies; a *commitment to defer* (or a norm of deferring) is, thus, in place. Now, such a commitment might interfere with the commitments incurred upon making a speech act of evaluation (as with me inviting The Queen to dinner), thus leading to the elimination of certain propositions from the set of those the interlocutors should strive to make true. For example (and especially if the setting is one of learning), upon countering Critic’s utterance of “*Irreversible* is balanced,” Layperson should not be expected to make similar utterances in the future. (There might be issues with cases in which Layperson doesn’t trust Critic’s expertise, but I leave these aside.) Adding these other commitments, of a social nature, on top of the commitments incurred upon making a speech act of evaluation provides a way to claim that the

disagreement between Critic and Layperson is not faultless. Given the nature of the context in which their disagreement takes place, it is not faultless because Layperson has violated the social norm of deferring to Critic. Of course, there are contexts in which no such norm is in place, and so disagreement might be faultless (see the discussion at the end of the previous section); however, as argued there, the existence of one type of context doesn't preclude the existence of the other type.

One might ask at this point whether this type of social normativity wouldn't preclude Layperson from disagreeing with Critic in the first place, rather than producing an effect at the level of commitments *after* the disagreement has been made explicit. In other words, given the commitment to defer, shouldn't Layperson simply keep their mouth shut? This is a fair point, but I take it that exchanges like this do happen, that they are felicitous (from a purely linguistic point of view), and, moreover, that they are disagreements. So, in my view, this reply would amount to not taking the data at face value. But, also, interpreting the social norms as precluding disagreement in the first place seems to be the wrong take in some contexts: for example, in a learning situation in which Layperson is asked what they thought of *Irreversible*, it is okay – perhaps even expected – that they disagree with Critic. So, amending Karczewska's view by introducing social norms that trump the commitments incurred by making a speech act of evaluation doesn't make the data we rely on unintelligible or irrational.

A different worry concerns the status of the social norms I am appealing to, especially in connection to the commitments following a speech act of evaluation. Granted, I haven't given here a full account of the nature of such norms, and I also haven't specified how exactly they interact with the commitments postulated by Karczewska, except in the example at hand. This is a significant task, but one that I cannot undertake here.<sup>13</sup> However, even without having all the details worked out, one might already wonder whether the solution envisaged is genuine. Regardless of how they interact with social norms, the commitments one incurs in making a speech act of evaluation is what *makes* these acts evaluations and not something else. So, the fact that these commitments are trumped by other norms doesn't render those flouting the latter at fault – at least from the point of view of the *correctness* of the speech act. (This point

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps one way to go is to follow Karczewska's idea that the social norms in question are also commitments to making certain propositions true. If so, the social norms trumping the commitments incurred by making a speech act of evaluation simply means giving priority to making true the propositions associated with the social norms to the detriment of those associated with the speech act. This is the picture implicit in the previous paragraphs.

is familiar from the heated debate concerning assertion.) One might thus think that the solution offered is spurious.

On the face of it, this is a good objection, but note that in order for it to go through one has to agree that the notion of fault we employ should be related to the said commitments – that is, it should be an *illocutionary* fault. However, there are many notions of fault that could be employed, thus there is plenty of room for maneuver. When the challenge from faultless disagreement entered the philosophical scene, it was assumed that the notion of fault that is at stake is essentially connected to truth, in that one was committing a mistake (and thus at fault) when asserting something false. In addressing the challenge, many contextualists have held on to this way of understanding fault. But even relativists now agree that there are many notions of fault – as there are of disagreement (e.g., MacFarlane 2014). So, even if the notion of fault that seems to fit more naturally with speech acts of evaluations is illocutionary (as made clear, in a *constitutive* sense), we are nevertheless not forced to adopt it. In other words, even if Layperson is faultless because they attempt to impose certain commitments on Critic as a result of making a speech act of evaluation, they are at fault with respect to the social norms alluded to. This is a notion that seems to me entirely intelligible and – more importantly – gives us what we want in terms of accounting for (at least one way of understanding) faultless disagreement.

As it turns out, this solution makes the postulation of contextualist content an idle wheel when it comes to explaining the intuition of both faultlessness and disagreement. But I don't see that, in itself, as a problem. There is somewhat of a consensus in the literature that such intuitions cannot *by themselves* tip the scale in favor of either contextualism or relativism (see, for example, Baker 2014, Belleri 2014, Palmira 2015, Stojanovic 2017).<sup>14</sup> Further arguments need to be brought in to adjudicate between the views, and the more phenomena are considered, the better supported the decision will be. For example, other “intuition-based” arguments have been proposed: eavesdropping scenarios (Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson 2005), as well as retraction (the act of

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<sup>14</sup> Thus, Palmira writes: “I believe that the only option available amounts to contending that the significance of faultless disagreement for the semantic debate about predicates of personal taste should be considerably downplayed. If it ever makes sense to defend Relativism as opposed to Contextualism, or Contextualism as opposed to Realism about taste discourse, little support is forthcoming from the datum of apparent faultless disagreement” (2015: 367–368). On the other side of the aisle, MacFarlane's skepticism in relation to using faultless disagreement as an argument for any semantic view (relativism, in particular) is well known, as the following quote witnesses: “I have avoided using this phrase here, because it is dangerously ambiguous. Both ‘faultless’ and ‘disagreement’ can be understood in several ways, and how we understand them matters greatly for the plausibility of ‘faultless disagreement’ and its significance for the debate about relative truth” (2014: 133).

“taking back” a previous speech act) have been taken to provide ample support for relativism (Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson 2005, MacFarlane 2014, Dinges 2022), followed by a solid reaction to this support from contextualists, based on both empirical studies (e.g., Knobe and Yalcin 2014, Kneer 2021) and theoretical considerations (e.g., Raffman 2016, Marques 2018). Further, contextualists have appealed to arguments based on syntactic phenomena such as binding, control, sluicing, etc. (e.g., Schaffer 2011, Snyder 2013, Glanzberg 2022), while relativists, on their part, have offered similar arguments (see Kölbel 2009 for a version of the famous “operator argument,” and Lasersohn 2009 for arguments from embedding under factive verbs and truth-evaluative adverbs). I have not touched on any of the issues that such phenomena and the arguments based on them raise (nor does Karczewska in her paper), but I’m happy to allow for contextualist contents. Of course, this also means that relativist contents should be allowed – at least until the other arguments in the debate are considered. This, in turn, means that the amendment to Karczewska’s account of faultless disagreement proposed here enjoys a certain amount of independence from the semantic framework one chooses and is thus potentially usable across the whole logical space. Illocutionary (faultless) disagreement, in the form proposed in this paper, is for the taking.

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