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Taste and Acquaintance

AARON MESKIN AND JON ROBSON[1]

1. Introduction

The analogy between ordinary, bodily taste and critical or aesthetic taste plays a recurring role in the history of aesthetics.[2] Hume famously remarked on the "great resemblance between mental and bodily taste" in his discussion of Sancho's kinsmen, and he goes on to develop his idea of delicacy of sentiment through extended comparison with the good or delicate palate.[3] Voltaire discussed the analogy explicitly in his entry on Goût (i.e., taste) in the *Encyclopédie*:

> This sense, this capacity for discriminating between different foods, has given rise, in all known languages, to the metaphorical use of the word "taste" to designate the discernment of beauty and flaws in all the arts. […] In common with physical taste it is sensitive to what is good and reacts to it with a feeling of pleasure, it refuses with disgust what is bad […] and sometimes it needs practice to develop discrimination.[4]

Although some philosophers are skeptical about the analogy, and contemporary aestheticians talk less of taste and more of aesthetic judgment, these notions of taste still play an important role in much contemporary discussion.[5] Moreover, discussions of "good taste", "bad taste" and so forth are central to popular discourse about our aesthetic capacities.[6]

Our interest in this paper is in a specific way in which bodily taste is frequently thought to be analogous to critical taste; the putative similarity in the epistemology of judgments in the two domains.[7] According to Carolyn Korsmeyer "both literal taste and taste for art require first-hand acquaintance with their objects. Just as one cannot decide that soup is well seasoned without actually sipping it, so one cannot conclude that music is moving without hearing it."[8] Similarly, Kevin Sweeney claims that "gustatory judgment, like critical appreciation, must be based on our own sensory experience."[9] The suggestion that gustatory and critical judgments are alike in this way may seem uncontroversial. It appears obvious to many that to know that a

particular object (or type of object) tastes a certain way we must have tasted it for ourselves; the proof of the pudding, we are all told, is in the eating. Or the proof of the port is in the drinking—Barry Smith claims that knowing what a wine tastes like requires tasting it. He writes: "We certainly rely on subjective experiences to know how a wine tastes. For even if we know a great deal about its objective chemical properties or vinification, *we would not know what it tastes like without tasting it.* The experience of tasting provides the only route to such knowledge."[10] And it has seemed just as obvious to many philosophers that aesthetic judgment requires first-person experience of its objects.[11] Moreover, in contrast to these two cases, there seems to be no general and in principle problem with our gaining knowledge about an object's other perceptual properties in the absence of sensory experience of it (e.g., you can learn what color a friend's new car is merely on the basis of her testimony concerning it).

In support of this disanalogy, between bodily and critical taste judgments on the one hand and standard perceptual judgments on the other, consider the following: Although there is nothing problematic in someone asserting – perhaps on the basis of testimony – that a species of flower she has never seen is red or that the mating call of a bird she has never encountered is high-pitched, we would think it exceedingly strange for someone to tell us that "the house red is delicious, but I've never tasted it" or that "the cheese has a slightly sweet nutty taste with a caramel aftertaste, but I haven't tried it." And analogous assertions in the aesthetic domain – "the painting is elegant but I've never seen it", "the melody is beautiful but I've never heard it" – seem just as puzzling.[12] A natural explanation for these phenomena is that gustatory and aesthetic judgments require first-hand perceptual experience of their objects, whereas judgments of color, sound and so forth do not.

It is perhaps worth emphasizing that the oddity of the assertions mentioned above seems to have to do with the lack of first-person experience of particular objects—the objects of judgment as it were—not the absence of first-person experience in general. We take it that this is key to understanding the alleged analogy between bodily and critical judgment. One might read Sweeney, for example, as claiming merely that sensory experience of some kind or other is required for gustatory and critical judgment (that an agent requires *some* first-hand experience of saltiness to judge a soup salty, *some* first-hand experience of gracefulness to judge a dance graceful and so forth). But although this claim – which we discuss further below – might be true, it would be a misreading since Sweeney goes on to assert that "we ought to base our judgment of the dish [a *potage de Crécy*] on our own experience of *the soup*."[13] Similarly, both the Korsmeyer and Smith quotes make clear that it is first person experience *of a particular item* which is alleged to be necessary for gustatory judgment. Smith talks about the necessity of tasting the wine itself and Korsmeyer about both kinds of judgment requiring first-hand acquaintance *with their objects*. Perhaps most importantly, the extensive literature on critical judgment focuses on the question of whether first person experience of an object is necessary for making an aesthetic judgment concerning that object—not simply on whether first person experience of some kind or other is required for it. Insofar, then, as the claims we are considering are intended to highlight an analogy between the gustatory and the aesthetic, they must be interpreted along similar lines. So although we shall have more to say below about the weak claim that first person experience of some kind is required for gustatory judgment, our starting point will be the stronger claim which posits a necessary link between gustatory judgment of an item and first person experience of that very item.

In the remainder of this paper we shall argue that, despite its initial appeal, the claim that gustatory and critical judgments are analogous in this way is mistaken. The two sorts of judgments are, as a matter of fact, similar in their epistemology, but Korsmeyer, Sweeney and

others have got things entirely backwards—neither gustatory nor critical judgments require first-hand acquaintance with their objects. We have made the case that aesthetic judgment does not require first-hand acquaintance in earlier papers.[14] Hence, although we briefly discuss our reasons for this below, our focus in the remainder of the paper will be on arguing that first person experience is not required either to make the judgment that an item of food or drink tastes a certain way or for such judgments to attain the status of knowledge.[15] In fact, there are a wide variety of ways in which we can acquire this knowledge.[16] In the next section we shall discuss various formulations of a putative principle of gustatory epistemology – the gustatory acquaintance principle (GAP) – which seeks to articulate a necessary connection between gustatory judgments and first person experience. §3 will focus on what appears to be the most plausible formulation of GAP – one which parallels the weaker reading of the quotes from Sweeney and others discussed above – but argue that it only achieves this plausibility at the cost of becoming uninteresting (in that it no longer distinguishes gustatory judgments from other perceptual judgments). In §4 we explore a general challenge to any formulation of GAP by offering some considerations in support of testimony about taste as a basis for gustatory knowledge. In §5-8 we move on to consider a variety of arguments which could be offered to legitimize a rejection of gustatory testimony and demonstrate that they are all ultimately unsuccessful. §9 offers some concluding remarks.

Before proceeding, though, it is worth noting that in this paper we will follow ordinary language and traditional philosophical practice (as exemplified in the quotations from Korsmeyer and Smith above) in using the term ‘taste’ broadly rather than by utilizing its narrower technical sense. That is, we shall use the term to refer both to taste strictly so called (i.e., the five or six basic tastes) as well as flavor, which is based on multi-sensory experiences stemming from a combination of taste, odor and stimulation of the trigeminal nerve.[17] Similarly

we shall use the term 'gustatory' in its ordinary broad sense, referring to that which is "concerned with tasting or the sense of taste" rather than in the narrower technical sense.[18]

2. Taste and Acquaintance

Doubtless the claims concerning the epistemology of gustatory and aesthetic judgments we have considered above will have already put many readers in mind of Richard Wollheim's acquaintance principle (AP) according to which aesthetic judgments "must be based on first-hand experience of their objects and are not, except within very narrow limits, transmissible from one person to another."[19] We think it very likely that the philosophers we have discussed above would advocate applying some analogous principle with respect to gustatory judgments. Korsmeyer and Sweeney explicitly endorse gustatory analogues of this principle and Smith's claim that "the experience of tasting provides the only route to such knowledge" can be interpreted as expressing a similar commitment.[20] How, then, should we formulate a gustatory analogue of the acquaintance principle (GAP)?

First, it is not clear that the analogy with AP is a particularly happy one. While AP and its predecessors – earlier principles in the same spirit were put forward by Mothersill and Tormey – have been extremely influential and garnered a number of enthusiastic proponents, they have also been challenged by a series of compelling counterexamples.[21] It has been argued, for example, that we can legitimately base (at least some of) our aesthetic judgments on reproductions, photographs or recordings of the objects in question, on perceptual imagination, enumerative induction or suitably precise descriptions.[22] Hence, we can see that a formulation of GAP closely analogous to AP such as:

GAP1: Gustatory judgments concerning the taste of an object must be based on first-hand experience of the object itself,[23]

Would clearly be vulnerable to parallel counterexamples such as:

Duplicates: If a super-scientist were to use her matter duplicator to make an exact copy of a bottle of Chateau d'Yquem 1787 then we could, by drinking the copy, come to know what the original wine tastes like without drinking it. Or – to use a rather more prosaic example – if you've tried one Oreo cookie then you probably have a very good idea what other Oreos taste like.

How should the proponent of GAP respond to counterexamples to GAP1 such as these? Most likely they will attempt to restrict or reinterpret the principle in some way – paralleling moves made with respect to AP in the aesthetic domain. One obvious suggestion here would be:

GAP2: Gustatory judgments concerning the taste of an object must be based on first-hand experience of the object itself or some adequate surrogate.

Appeals to surrogates and the like are common in the literature on AP but, as has already been noted in a number of places, it is difficult to make sense of the notion without rendering the principles in question either trivial or false, and similar worries hold with respect to GAP2.[24] It seems, for example, that we can get gustatory knowledge of how Vegemite tastes without tasting Vegemite or any Vegemite-like substance, indeed without tasting anything at all. Consider David Lewis's appeal to:

Neurological stimulation: "There is a change that takes place in you when you have the experience [of e.g. tasting Vegemite] and thereby come to know what it's like. Perhaps the exact same change could in principle be produced in you by precise neurosurgery, very far beyond the limits of present-day technique."[25]

In such as case we would have acquired knowledge of how vegemite tastes without actually tasting anything so, a fortiori, without having tasted any suitable surrogate for vegemite. Perhaps, though, this is the wrong way to construe the appeal to surrogates. Perhaps what is required is not that we have an adequate surrogate for the object tasted but that we have an adequate surrogate for the taste itself. This suggests:

> GAP3: Gustatory judgments concerning the taste of an object must be based on first-hand experience of the *taste* itself or some adequate surrogate for that taste.

What is relevant, then, according to GAP3 is not we have experience of the object or anything similar to it but rather that we have experience of *the taste of* that object or some sufficiently similar taste. The inclusion of sufficiently similar tastes is needed to deal with examples such as:

> *Sensory substitutes*: Companies such as Givaudan make vast amounts of money through the creation and sale of natural and artificial flavors which are used to mimic the tastes of ordinary foods.[26] These products are not typically perfect sensory substitutes – otherwise an experience of them would, plausibly, be an experience of the taste itself – nonetheless, we think it plausible that we can, at least in some cases, gain knowledge about what something tastes like by ingesting a synthetically produced flavoring agent designed to imitate it. Provided, that is, that in some cases we possess sufficient sensory imagination to move – perhaps on the basis of some helpful descriptions of the original taste – from knowledge of how the artificial flavorings taste to knowledge of how the original object tastes. (And if it is not yet the case that we are ever in this position then this is surely simply a contingent fact—artificial strawberry flavor could, eventually, become close enough in taste to actual strawberries to provide sufficiently imaginative tasters with knowledge concerning the taste of strawberries).

With this inclusion, GAP3 is certainly the most plausible of the putative GAP principles we have examined so far. However, this plausibility stems in part from the fact that GAP3 itself is ambiguous. In the next section we argue that one natural disambiguation of it may result in a true principle but, nevertheless, one that fails to preserve the alleged disanalogy described above between gustatory judgments and other quotidian perceptual judgments.

3. Interpreting GAP3

GAP3 seems to imply that if I had *never* experienced a particular taste for myself then I could not come to know without experiencing the taste itself (or some close surrogate) that a particular object has that taste. But what do we mean when we talk about particular tastes here? One suggestion is that we refer here to what Michael Shaffer calls the experience "of a taste property at the most basic level" and deny that I can know that an object tastes sweet or salty unless I have previous experience of sweetness, saltiness or some adequate surrogate for these.[27] To see how such a view might be cashed out imagine an individual (Bland Mary) who is raised in a taste impoverished environment. The food and drink Mary consumes are perfectly nutritious but they are also maximally bland with respect to taste and, in particular, are neither sweet nor salty. Mary is, however, an expert taste scientist who has read everything there is to read concerning taste. But, the objector claims, Mary cannot know of, say, a particular soup that it tastes sweet or salty because she lacks the relevant taste experiences.

Bland-Mary is of course the gustatory equivalent of Mary in Frank Jackson's famous knowledge argument, and this is precisely why the argument, as it stands, does nothing to help the supporter of GAP3 who claims to have highlighted a disanalogy between gustatory judgments and perceptual judgments of other kinds.[28] What we should say about the epistemic states of Mary and Bland Mary before and after their experiencing the relevant sensory qualities

for the first time is, of course, a matter of much debate but fortunately it is not something that we need to resolve here. Rather, we shall content ourselves with pointing out that whatever we say about the kinds of knowledge Bland Mary cannot have prior to experiencing saltiness or some adequate surrogate, we should draw exactly parallel conclusions regarding Mary and her knowledge of redness prior to leaving her infamous black and white room. Hence, if GAP3 is intended to be read in the way suggested above, as a claim about our experience of taste properties 'at the most basic level', then it does not reveal any disanalogy between taste and color judgments. On this reading, then, the principle may well be true, but it is uninteresting. No *distinctive* characteristic of gustatory judgment or gustatory knowledge has been indicated; the principle is simply a narrow gustatory version of a plausible (albeit controversial) claim concerning perceptual knowledge more generally. Since we take supporters of GAP to be interested in a feature of gustatory judgments which distinguishes them from other quotidian perceptual judgments, this reading of GAP3 will not appeal to them.

Finally, an alternative interpretation of GAP3 might focus on evaluative gustatory judgments rather than on gustatory judgments simpliciter.

> GAP3E: Evaluative gustatory judgments concerning the taste of an object must be based on first-hand experience of the taste itself or some adequate surrogate for that taste.

The first thing to note is that GAP3E is fairly narrow in scope—since it does not preclude non-evaluative gustatory judgments in the absence of first-hand experience it could not serve to underwrite Smith's claim that tasting a wine is required to know what it tastes like. Nor could it explain why various non-evaluative gustatory assertions of the kind described above (e.g., "It has a nutty aftertaste, but I haven't tried it.") sound odd. Moreover, GAP3E cannot be plausibly derived from a general principle about evaluative judgments (such as the claim that

all evaluative judgments require first-hand experience) since it is implausible to suppose that evaluative epistemic judgment (for example, that someone has a justified belief) must be based on some sort of first-hand experience.[29] Hence, GAP3E—if true—must be true because of some feature of the gustatory domain. For this reason, we believe GAP3E need not be treated as a special case and we take the arguments we offer below to be just as effective against it as they are against the more generic GAP3.

Of course there are a range of other possible interpretations of GAP3 – alongside other formulations of GAP we have yet to consider – but we shall not attempt the daunting task of dealing with each of these in turn. Instead, we shall spend the rest of this paper considering a general argument against any formulation of GAP. We will argue that any interesting version of the principle (i.e., any version which marks a difference between gustatory and other perceptual judgments) should be rejected since it will fail to account for the possibility of the testimonial transmission of gustatory knowledge.

4. Taste-imony

As out discussion above has highlighted it is a matter of some controversy exactly what routes to gustatory knowledge, besides paradigmatic first-hand experience, a theorist attracted to some formulation of GAP can countenance. But it is clear that they must seek to exclude cases of what Robert Hopkins calls "pure testimony" where an agent forms her belief that *p* "on the basis that her informant T claims that *p*, and independently of any evidence that T offers for that claim."[30] Anyone who accepts that pure testimony can routinely be a route to gustatory knowledge – that we can, for example, learn that a wine tastes vaguely sulphurous merely on the basis of someone else's say so – has clearly abandoned not merely one formulation of GAP but the very core of the principle.[31] In the remainder of this paper, then, we will turn to ask

what, if anything, we can learn from the testimony of others concerning the taste of food and drink; or, to borrow a term from *The Simpsons*, what is the epistemic value of *taste-imony*?[32] We will argue that taste-imony can be, and often is, a source of gustatory knowledge and that, as such, no formulation of GAP is correct

While it is now widely accepted that the testimony of others is one of our primary sources of knowledge the view that taste-imony can serve as a source of gustatory knowledge is far from uncontroversial.[33] In addition to the expressions of general skepticism regarding gustatory judgments not formed on the basis of paradigmatic first-hand experience some skepticism has been expressed specifically concerning the epistemic value of taste-imony. Shaffer, for example, claims that "there are no good reasons to accept much of the testimony" of gastronomic experts.[34] For the remainder of this paper we will focus on arguing that skeptical views regarding taste-imony are mistaken. We *can*, and often do, gain knowledge about the taste of food and drinks from others—both ordinary folks and gastronomic experts.

So why should we accept that such knowledge is available via taste-imony? One important prima facie motivation for accepting taste-imony is that a number of extant practices would be difficult to account for if gustatory testimony carried no epistemic value; for example, practices such as restaurant reviews and informal recommendations which both seem to suggest that testimony about how objects taste is of epistemic value. This claim might meet with some skepticism; after all, restaurant reviewers are notorious for talking about many things other than the taste of the food at the restaurant (the service, food presentation, the décor, the clientele, the biography of the chef, and so on), and informal restaurant recommendations often offer overall evaluations ("It's an excellent restaurant") or are formulated in terms of subjective preference ("We like the duck", "I think you will like it").

This is true, but we contend that testimony about taste is, nevertheless, a significant aspect of those practices. Restaurant reviewers describe many things in their reviews, but one key thing they do is describe the tastes of the foods they eat.[35] So, for example, a recent review of London restaurant FM Mangal by the well-known British food critic Jay Rayner talks of a "sweet-sour vinegary sauce" served with a bowl of grilled onions and garlic and "the kick of that vibrant purple citrus sumac and a little cumin" in a seasoning mix.[36] And John Lanchester's final *Guardian* review of L'Enclume, describes the "subtle umami flavours" of a dish of kohlrabi dumplings in a monkswell cheddar sauce.[37] Similarly, informal restaurant recommendations often include descriptions of the tastes that prospective customers can expect to encounter ("their sausage is peppery", "their potato salad is deliciously mustardy", "their Eccles cakes are a bit bitter"). We contend that the best explanation for the practice of providing such taste descriptions is that the author or speaker is successfully conveying taste information by means of taste-imony.

Moreover, even if one were to discount the role of taste-imony in such cases, there are other tasting practices which are hard to make sense of if testimony about taste has no epistemic value. For example, there are various professionals – professional tasters working for water companies as well as the food and beverage industry, sommeliers and so forth – whose jobs seem to be predicated on the assumption that their testimony about taste is of epistemic value to its recipients.[38] Of course epistemic value comes in degrees, and – as has already been discussed with respect to recommendations in the aesthetic case (Robson 2012: 5-6) – it by no means follows from the fact that testimony in a certain domain has some epistemic value that it can be a source of knowledge. There are, after all, clearly cases (including many mundane cases concerning shapes, colors and the like) where testimony will provide some warrant for a belief but not warrant sufficient for knowledge. Still, if we accept the assumption (implicit in these practices) that taste-imony in these instances typically carries some epistemic value, it is

difficult to see on what basis we could deny the further claim that, given the right circumstances (for example, multiple independent recommendations from reliable sources who we know to share our sensibilities), such testimony can serve as a source of gustatory knowledge.[39] We do not, of course, take such considerations to be conclusive but we take it that they, at least, provide strong prima facie motivation for believing that in the right circumstances testimony can be a source of gustatory knowledge.[40]

The denial of this claim, then, would require some impressive argument for the rejection of taste-imony. Especially given that, in the absence of such argument, it would appear problematically arbitrary to claim that while testimony is in most cases a legitimate, indeed ubiquitous, source of knowledge it is impermissible to appeal to it in forming our gustatory beliefs. We will now turn to ask whether any such argument can be given. In the following sections we will examine four factors which we suspect have played a significant role in the rejection of taste-imony: (i) divergence in taste judgment, (ii) the alleged unreliability of taste-imony, (iii) context-sensitivity about taste terms, and (iv) the impermissibility of the kinds of assertion ("the cheese has a slightly sweet nutty taste with a caramel aftertaste, but I haven't tried it" etc.) which we considered at the beginning of the paper. We will argue, however, that none of these factors are able to provide any cogent reason for rejecting taste-imony or, to be more precise, we will argue that they cannot do so without also engendering more general forms of skepticism which critics of taste-imony would wish to avoid.

5. Taste Variation

We suspect that the primary motivation for skepticism with respect to taste-imony is the well-founded belief that there is widespread interpersonal and intrapersonal variation in tasting abilities and taste judgments. For in addition to everyday phenomena which suggest such

divergence (e.g., we often find that what tastes salty to one person tastes under-seasoned to another) there is a significant body of scientific literature which establishes "substantial variation…in normal human taste abilities."[41] So, for example, there are well-established genetically-based variations in the perception of bitterness, most notably a genetic variation in the ability to taste certain substances such as phenylthiocarbamide (PTC) and PROP. Many of us know about tasters, super-tasters and non-tasters, but there is significant genetic variation in the perceptions of other tastes as well.[42] Recent research suggests that "the ability of humans to detect sourness at low concentrations is partially determined by genetics."[43] And although "human umami taste perception variability remains poorly understood" there is evidence that a significant portion of the population is insensitive to MSG (a paradigmatic exemplar of the quality).[44] Finally, there is some suggestion in the literature that there may be a genetic basis for variation in sensitivity to the 'sixth taste', fat (*pinguis*).[45]

Moving away from genetic factors, it has also been suggested that previous exposure to salt may cause some interpersonal variation in salt sensitivity.[46] Other non-genetic factors are also relevant to individual variation in taste. So, for example, age seems to affect sensitivity to PROP, and unsurprisingly smoking has been discovered to affect taste buds and, hence, taste thresholds.[47] Individual differences have also been found in the detection of sweetness.[48] Contextual factors, such as perceptual contrast and adaptation, can also affect the way food and drink tastes—both between individuals and within the same individual across time.[49]

So there is good reason to think that there is a high degree of interpersonal variation with respect to the detection of tastes. Is this good reason for thinking that gustatory testimony should be rejected as a source of knowledge? We do not believe so. The existence of a significant degree of interpersonal variation is not, by itself, enough to undercut the epistemic value of gustatory testimony. Consider, as an analogy, color judgments. People also diverge in their first-hand color judgments – those with protanopia, for example, might take an object to

be blue which those with normal color vision would judge to be purple – but color is a paradigmatic area where testimony (from appropriate sources) is considered to be unproblematic. In fact, the anomalous trichromat among the authors of this paper regularly relies on the testimony of others about light pink and green. And note that color judgments plausibly exhibit a great deal of variation even when such cases of improper functioning are excluded (see, for example, Cohen's discussion of intra-personal variation in color perception), but this does not vitiate color testimony.[50] Similarly, the existence of some divergence with respect to sensitivity to salt (e.g., because of salt dysguesia or previous exposure) provides little motivation for a general rejection of taste-imony about saltiness. In fact, just as in the color-blindness case, the first form of divergence seems to give at least some people a distinctive reason for relying on testimony about saltiness rather than on their own first-hand judgments. Of course we do need to take the 'appropriate sources' caveat seriously. Just as the aforementioned author's testimony about pink and green are of little epistemic value, so too is the salt dysguesic's testimony about the saltiness of their food. But this provides us no reason to impugn taste testimony in general. So variation in taste, taste abilities and taste judgments does not, by itself, provide good reason for rejecting taste-imony.

We say "by itself" because the varieties and extent of taste divergence may also be used to motivate some of the other objections we consider below. One might, for example, think that the extent of divergence concerning gustatory matters licenses the claim that gustatory judgment is problematically unreliable or else that the kinds of divergence we find in the taste case support the existence of *blameless variation* or *irresolvable disputes* about taste; explained by, for example, context sensitivity concerning taste judgments. Even if this is the case, though, the epistemic problems for taste-imony (if any) would then concern these additional features of taste judgments rather than divergence per se.

6. Unreliability

Many accounts of testimony take reliability to be a necessary condition for the transmission of warrant or knowledge, and this is not a claim which we have any desire to contest.[51] If taste-imony is sufficiently unreliable then this would be a genuine reason for rejecting it as a source of gustatory knowledge, and this does seem like a live possibility. Summarizing years of research on wine communication, by herself and others, Adrienne Lehrer points out that non-experts do no better than chance at describing wines so that a partner can match them.[52] Perhaps even more surprisingly, "people are no better at reidentifying their own descriptions than those of others."[53] Ordinary testimony about the taste of wine, then, does not seem especially reliable.[54] Nevertheless, we do not think that kinds of unreliability we find in such cases – or in the cases such as salt dysguesia discussed above – ultimately provide a reason for an across-the-board skepticism regarding taste-imony.

One reason for such a rejection would be the claim that gustatory judgment in general is massively unreliable but – even setting aside general worries about the plausibility of this claim – this is not a move that is open to our opponents. The critics of taste-imony we are considering (those who are sympathetic to some formulation of GAP) are typically committed to the claim that first-hand gustatory experience can – at least under certain circumstances – be a source of gustatory knowledge. As such they will presumably accept that at least some of us are reliable in forming our gustatory beliefs. So no blanket dismissal of gustatory testimony looks plausible on these grounds.[55] The problematic unreliability, if any, then must arise with respect to testimonial transmission or uptake.

One motivation for regarding transmission as unreliable in taste-imony cases concerns the richness of taste experience – at least with respect to judgments concerning, say, fine wines – compared to the poverty of our gustatory vocabulary. This means, as Lehrer puts it, that

"translating taste and aroma experiences into language is very difficult".[56] Such problems, though, do not appear to be unique to taste judgments but rather apply to perceptual judgments more generally. We are, for example, typically able to distinguish many more shades of color than we have names for but, again, this does not keep color testimony from serving as a source of knowledge. If we expect testifiers (especially non-expert testifiers) in either area to provide us with reliable testimony concerning particular determinate colors or tastes then we are likely to be disappointed. Most people lack both the ability to identify, and the language to describe, a particular color as International Klein Blue, and it is plausible that something similar is true in the case of determinate tastes. So, for example, ordinary eaters will not, we suspect, be able to identify a chili as possessing a specific number of Scoville heat units. Fortunately, though, most testimony we receive in these areas concerns much less determinate properties; that a painting is blue – or, a little more ambitiously, azure or cobalt – that a cake is sweet, that a chili is hot, that a wine tastes fruity or that a smoothie tastes of strawberries and bananas. And your typical layperson seems perfectly well equipped with the gustatory (and color) vocabulary to describe such cases.

Suppose, then, that testifiers are both reliable at forming gustatory beliefs and in offering gustatory testimony. How might things go badly with regard to testimonial uptake? One possibility is that recipients of gustatory testimony are systematically incapable of accurately grasping the content of that testimony because of the context sensitivity of many taste terms.

7. Context sensitivity

Many of the terms used to ascribe taste (e.g., 'sweet', 'salty' and 'sour') are gradable adjectives and, like standard relative gradable adjectives such as 'tall' and 'near' they exhibit context

sensitivity.[57] So, for example, 'sweet' in a context where wines of all sorts are being compared plausibly expresses a different content (and picks out a different property) than it does in another context where only dessert wines are being compared. If this is right, then reliable taste-imonial uptake requires figuring out the specific contextually-determined content that is picked out by a taste term in particular contexts. This sort of context-sensitivity does not generate a significant problem for taste-imony. After all, in many (perhaps most) situations in which we are recipients of testimony involving gradable terms we are well aware of the contextual standard that is in play. We do not, after all, typically have trouble gaining knowledge via testimony about who is tall and what is near.

However, many taste terms may exhibit a less standard form of context-sensitivity, which may generate a more substantial barrier to taste-imonial uptake. So, for example, a number of philosophers believe that predicates of personal taste such as 'fun' and, most relevantly for our purposes, 'tasty' (as well as the sentences in which they appear) exhibit a distinctive perspectival or evaluator-relative context sensitivity.[58] A Tinkertoy version of such a view holds that when Amy says "Fritos are tasty" she expresses the proposition that they are tasty for her, but when Rory says "Fritos are tasty" he expresses the proposition that they are tasty for him. More technically, we may say that such adjectives have some sort of implicit experiencer parameter which is fixed by context – sometimes this parameter will pick out an individual person, sometimes a group, and sometimes people in general. If this is right about 'tasty' (and there are some reasons to be skeptical, see, e.g., Lasersohn 2005) and if other taste adjectives work similarly, then the recipient of such taste-imony might seem to face a difficult challenge of determining whether it is appropriate for her to apply 'sweet' or 'salty' to a food item merely on the basis of someone else's taste-imony. For, after all, our coming to know that something is sweet or salty *for you* does not entail that we know that it is sweet or salty *for us*.

Now we are willing to admit that this sort of contextualist story may be true about many of the terms we use to ascribe tastes but even if so, there is no *in principle* problem for gaining knowledge via taste-imony. In the first place, we may in certain circumstances have very good inductive reasons to think that what is sweet for you is also what is sweet for us. If we are in such a situation, then there is no impediment to our coming to be warranted in thinking that the strawberry is sweet (for us) on the basis of your testimony that it is sweet (for you). Further – even if this sort of perspectival or evaluator-relative contextualism about taste terms like 'salty' and 'sweet' is true – many of the ways the view can be spelled out seem to create no in-principle trouble for testimony. So, for example, perhaps context simply picks out a salient statistical construct (e.g., the average 9 year old taster or the average adult male taster). If so, there is no obvious reason that this would create any difficulty for the recipient of testimony. Or, perhaps, context does not pick out an individual evaluator or perspective but, rather, the perspective of some significant group of people (e.g. people in general or people like us). If this is right, then when Amy tells Rory that "the pizza is salty" (perhaps because she judges that almost any human would find it salty) Rory may well be in a good position to know, on this basis and despite the individual differences in taste sensitivity that we have described above, that the pizza really is salty for people in general.[59]

8. Taste-imony and assertion

When motivating the intuitive appeal of GAP in §1 we mentioned the apparently problematic nature of assertions such as "the house red is delicious but I've never tasted it". Such assertions, it could be argued, are clearly impermissible on the grounds that it is illegitimate to make any assertion regarding gustatory taste in the absence of direct experience (or in the absence of whatever methods of belief formation a suitably formulated version of GAP ultimately rules as

legitimate). We think this is overstating things somewhat and that the phenomenon is a little more complex than the imagined objector suggests. It does not, for example, strike us as obviously problematic to assert that "I've never tried any of their food, it's far too spicy" but we are happy to grant that, in general, there is something wrong with making assertions of the relevant kind. What significance, though, do these claims about the legitimacy or gustatory *assertion* have to the debate over the legitimacy of forming gustatory *beliefs* on the basis of taste-imony? First of all, it might be alleged that many of those who are skeptics with respect to taste-imony have not been sufficiently attentive to the distinction between what it is legitimate to believe and what it is legitimate to assert; illicitly applying restrictions on the latter to the former.[60] More charitably, it might be claimed that part of what motivates the rejection of taste-imony is the thought that the illegitimacy of the relevant assertions is best explained by appeal to the illegitimacy of the corresponding beliefs. Since this second claim clearly poses a challenge to the epistemic value of taste-imony it is worth considering what the defender of taste-imony can say in response to it.

One plausible explanation for the problematic nature of the assertions in question is a confusion between taste and tasting. As Smith draws the distinction, tastes "are properties a wine [or other gustatory object] has" whereas tasting "is an experience a subject has".[61] We are not primarily interested in whether testimony can enable us to know what your experience of tasting is like or what our own experience of tasting is (or would be) like; though we think it can be a source of knowledge in both these areas. Rather, we are concerned with testimony as a source of knowledge concerning how particular objects taste independently of whether anyone actually has the experience of tasting them. As Smith notes, though, the two are very easily confused and a great deal of our folk talk and practice fails to distinguish between them.[62] As such it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that when someone asserts that a wine is fruity or a soup tastes of cumin they are typically taken to be asserting, or at least implicating,

certain things with respect to their own subjective taste experiences. Such assertions would therefore seem very mysterious in a situation where it is clear that no such subjective tasting has taken place. To support this point consider the difference in acceptability of asserting, when about to taste a dish for the first time "this tastes delicious" and "this will taste delicious". We take it the first sounds very odd, likely because the person is question will be taken to be referring to taste experiences which at present do not exist, whereas the latter seems perfectly acceptable because it merely anticipates, rather than reports, such sensations. If, on the other hand, we accept that the first assertion is – as the skeptics regarding taste-imony would have it – problematic due to the speaker's impoverished epistemic state, then it is very difficult to explain why the second assertion (made in epistemically identical conditions) seems perfectly felicitous.

Attractive though we find the taste/tasting explanation, we do not mean to commit ourselves to it and there are a number of prima facie plausible explanations which can be given as to why the assertions in question are illegitimate which do not appeal to the alleged epistemic deficiencies of the corresponding beliefs.[63] Given this, anyone whose rejection of taste-imony is primarily motivated by concerns relating to assertion has some explaining to do. Even if they have not merely conflated issues of belief and assertion (as we suspect many have) they cannot make a straightforward appeal to the impermissibility of certain assertions as evidence that the corresponding beliefs are similarly defective. Instead they must offer some argument to show that the defective epistemic status of the relevant beliefs is the best explanation for the illegitimacy of the target assertions. In the absence of such an argument, though, we conclude that the impermissibility of the relevant assertions does nothing to establish skepticism concerning taste-imony (or to support GAP more generally).

9. Conclusions

In this paper we have argued that – contrary to both apparent folk wisdom and the claims of a number of philosophers – there are no compelling reasons to impugn the epistemic standing of gustatory beliefs formed in the absence of first-hand experience and, in particular, of gustatory beliefs formed on the basis of taste-imony. Moreover, we have highlighted a number of promising considerations which tell in favor of accepting testimony concerning gustatory taste - paralleling the arguments concerning aesthetic judgment and aesthetic testimony we have presented elsewhere.[64] Our conclusion, then, is that Korsmeyer and Sweeney were mistaken in their characterization of the epistemological analogy between gustatory and aesthetic judgment. There may be important similarities between aesthetic and gustatory judgments, but dependence on first-person acquaintance is not one of these. It seems, then, that the proof of the pudding (and the painting) can sometimes be in the telling.[65]

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[1] The work is fully collaborative; authors are listed in alphabetical order.

[2] For discussion, see Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Taste," in the *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics,* 3rd ed, eds. Berys Gaut and Dominic M. Lopes (Routledge, 2013), pp. 257-266 and Elisabeth Schellekens, "Taste and Objectivity: The Emergence of the Concept of the Aesthetic,' *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009): 734-743. Note that we make no assumption that critical taste is extraordinary nor that it does not involve the body—these terms are simply used to distinguish one form of taste from another.

[3] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), pp. 234-241.

[4] D'Alembert, Jean Le Rond, Denis Diderot, Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, and François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, "Taste," in The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer. Ann Arbor: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 2003. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.168 (accessed March 3, 2014). Originally published as "Goût," Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, 7:761–770 (Paris, 1757).

[5] For skepticism see Roger A. Shiner, "Hume and the Causal Theory of Taste," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (1996): 237-49. For references to taste in contemporary aesthetics see Dominic M. Lopes, "Virtues of Art: Good Taste," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 82 (2008): 197-211; Jerrold Levinson, "Artistic Worth and Personal Taste," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68 (2010): 225-33; and Stephanie Ross, "Comparing and Sharing Taste: Reflections on Critical Advice," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70 (2012): 363-371.

[6] See, for example, Carl Wilson, *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

[7] By 'judgment' we mean to refer to the mental states that are typically expressed by assertions such as "That is beautiful" or "This is elegant" in the aesthetic case and "That is tasty" or "This tastes salty" in the ordinary bodily case. In what follows we will talk (for ease of exposition only) as if the relevant mental states are beliefs

rather than, say, some expressivist alternative but our central claims can easily be reformulated in terms of other candidate mental state.

[8] Korsmeyer, "Taste," pp. 258-259.

[9] Kevin W. Sweeney, "Can a Soup Be Beautiful? The Rise of Gastronomy and the Aesthetics of Food," in *Food & Philosophy: Eat, Think, and Be Merry*, eds. Fritz Allhoff and Dave Monroe, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), pp. 117-32, at p. 120.

[10] Barry C. Smith, "The Objectivity of Tastes and Tastings," in *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine*, ed. Barry C. Smith, (Oxford: Signal Books, 2007), pp. 41-78, at p. 44, italics added.

[11] See, for example, Mary Mothersill, "Critical Reasons," *Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1961): 74-78; Alan Tormey, "Critical Judgments," *Theoria* 39 (1973): 35–49; and Alan H. Goldman, "The Experiential Account of Aesthetic Value," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (2006): 333–42.

[12] See Brian Laetz, "A Modest Defense of Aesthetic Testimony," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (2008): 355-63, at p. 355, Gorodeisky, K. "A New Look at Kant's View of Aesthetic Testimony." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50.1 (2010): 53–70, at p.53, and Jon Robson, "Aesthetic Testimony," *Philosophy Compass* 7 (2012): 1-10, at p. 4.

[13] Sweeney, "Can a Soup Be Beautiful?" p. 120 italics added.

[14] Aaron Meskin, "Aesthetic Testimony: What Can We Learn From Others About Beauty and Art?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69 (2004): 65–91 and Jon Robson, "Appreciating the Acquaintance Principle: A Reply to Konigsberg," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 53 (2013): 237-45.

[15] Or perhaps, as Robert Hopkins suggests in the aesthetic case, to arrive at proper belief about how the object tastes. See Hopkins, "How to be a Pessimist about Aesthetic Testimony," *Journal of Philosophy* 108 (2011): 138–57. Although we focus on knowledge claims below the majority of our arguments can be applied (mutatis mutandis) to claims concerning proper belief.

[16] Although we shall use a number of different locutions, our focus is on propositional knowledge about ordinary tastes; that is, *knowledge that* a certain item tastes a certain way.

[17] Malika Auvray and Charles Spence, "The Multisensory Perception of Flavor," *Consciousness and Cognition* 17 (2008): 1016-31.

[18] "Gustatory, adj. and n.". OED Online. June 2014. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/82689?redirectedFrom=gustatory (accessed July 23, 2014).

[19] Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 233.

[20] Smith, "The Objectivity of Tastes and Tastings," p. 44.

[21] For earlier principles see Mothersill, "Critical Reasons", p. 78 and Tormey, "Critical Judgments," p. 62. For more recent defenses of views in the spirit of AP see Goldman "The Experiential Account"; Philip Pettit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism," in *Pleasure, Preference and Value*, ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 17–38; and Cain S. Todd, "Quasi-realism, Acquaintance and the Normative Claims of Aesthetic Judgement," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 (2004): 277–96.

[22] Paisley Livingston, "On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 260–78; Meskin, "Aesthetic Testimony," and Robson, "Appreciating the Acquaintance Principle."

[23] GAP1, as well as the other versions of GAP discussed below, may be interpreted as either a constitutive principle about the very conditions necessary for making a gustatory judgment or a normative principle about the conditions for making a justified or warranted gustatory judgment. For our purposes, this distinction is irrelevant.

[24] See, for example, Livingston, "On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics," and Robson, "Appreciating the Acquaintance Principle."

[25] David K. Lewis, "What Experience Teaches," in *Mind and Cognition, a Reader*, ed. William Lycan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 499-519, at p. 500.

[26] See www.givaudan.com.

[27] Michael Shaffer, "Taste, Gastronomic Expertise and Objectivity," *Food & Philosophy: Eat, Think, and Be Merry*, eds. Fritz Allhoff and Dave Monroe, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), pp.73-87, at 76.

[28] Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 127–136.

[29] And, of course, we have argued elsewhere that evaluative aesthetic judgements can be legitimate in the absence of such experience (and others, such as P. Sliwa, "In Defense of Moral Testimony." *Philosophical Studies*, 158 (2012): 175–95 have argued the same with respect to moral judgements).

[30] Hopkins "How to Be a Pessimist about Aesthetic Testimony," p.138.

[31] As Robert Hopkins argues with respect to AP in the aesthetic case (Hopkins, "How to Form Aesthetic Belief": 88-90.

[32] The term is used by Garth Motherloving in the episode *Sweets and Sour Marge*. Those familiar with the episode will realise that Garth is not strictly offering taste-imony of the kind we discuss.

[33] For classic discussions of the value of testimony see E. Fricker, "The Epistemology of Testimony." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. Suppl. 61 (1987): 57–83.C.A.J. Coady, *Testimony: a Philosophical*

Study, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) and Robert Audi, "The Place of Testimony in the Fabric of Knowledge and Justification," *Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1997): 405-22.

[34] Shaffer, "Taste, Gastronomic Expertise and Objectivity," p.77),

[35] Jonathan Cohen (personal correspondence) has expressed some scepticism about the extent to which this is true. We suppose it is an empirical question. But in addition to the examples mentioned below, we point readers to a recent interview in *The Believer* with the preeminent American food critic, Jonathan Gold in which he emphasizes the importance of describing tastes in his restaurant reviews. As Gold puts it "If something's salty, you've gotta say it's 'salty'." See Andrew Simmons "Jonathan Gold" *The Believer*, September 2012, accessed June 13, 2013. http://www.believermag.com/issues/201209/?read=interview_gold,

[36] Jay Rayner, "Restaurant review: FM Mangal, London SE5," *Guardian*, August 26, 2012. http://www.theguardian.com.

[37] John Lanchester, "Restaurant: L'Enclume, Cartmel, Cumbria," *Guardian*, July 6, 2012. http://www.theguardian.com.

[38] Sommeliers are, of course, concerned with matters other than the description of the tastes of various wines, but their recommendations are typically supported by such descriptions.

[39] This is one area where a Hopkins (2011) style appeal to non-epistemic norms of proper gustatory belief would clearly make a difference. But, as one of us has argued, Hopkins' case for non-epistemic norms of proper aesthetic belief is unpersuasive and we do not think the case is any stronger in the gustatory domain (Jon Robson, "Aesthetic Testimony and the Norms of Belief Formation," *European Journal of Philosophy* 2013: 1-14**.**

[40] We take our reasoning here to be a matter of inference to the best explanation rather than a transcendental argument. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

[41] U.K. Kim, P.A.S. Breslin, D. Reed, and D. Drayna, "Genetics of Human Taste Perception," *Journal of Dental Research* 83 2004: 448-453, at 448.

[42] Roughly three quarters of humans find PTC and PROP bitter, they are referred to as 'tasters'. The remaining quarter are commonly referred to as 'non-tasters'. Among tasters, there is a group who have a heightened sensitivity to PTC and PROP — members of this group are often called 'super tasters' (Garcia-Bailo, B, Toguri, C., Eny, K.M., and El-Sohemy, A. "Genetic Variation in Taste and Its Influence on Food Selection." *Journal of Integrative Biology* 13 (2009): 69-80, at p.70). For more on super-tasters have a listen to "John Lee Supertaster" by They Might Be Giants.

[43] Reed, Danielle R. and Antti Knaapila. "Genetics of Taste and Smell: Poisons and Pleasures." *Progress in Molecular Biology and Translational Science* 94 (2010): 213-240, at p.222); see also Garcia-Bailo et al. "Genetic Variation in Taste" p. 74.

[44] Garcia-Bailo et al. "Genetic Variation in Taste" p. 73, Reed and Knaapila "A Genetic Variation in Taste" p. 223).

[45] Garcia-Bailo et al. "Genetic Variation in Taste," p. 76.

[46] Reed and Knaapila 2010: 224, Garcia-Bailo et al. "Genetic Variation in Taste" p. 75.

[47] For the former see Monell Chemical Senses Center, "Children's Taste Sensitivity And Food Choices Influenced By Taste Gene," *ScienceDaily*. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2005/02/050211084620.htm (accessed August 11, 2014). For the latter see BioMed Central, "Smokers' Tongues Fail Taste Test," *ScienceDaily*. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/08/090819234654.htm (accessed August 11, 2014).

[48] Kim et al. "Genetics of Human Taste Perception," p. 450.

[49] Jonathan Cohen, "On the Limitations of Blind Tasting," *World of Fine Wine* 41 (2013): 74-81.

[50] Jonathan Cohen, "Color Properties and Color Ascriptions: A Relationalist Manifesto," *The Philosophical Review* 113 (2004): 451-506, at pp. 466-469.

[51] See Jennifer Lackey, "Knowing from Testimony," *Philosophy Compass* 1 (2006): 432–48, at pp. 434-438 and Sanford Goldberg, *Anti-Individualism: Mind and Language, Knowledge and Justification*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007), pp. 200-238.

[52] Adrienne Lehrer, *Wine and Conversation*, 2nd ed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 186.

[53] Lehrer, *Wine and Conversation*, p. 186.

[54] These claims are, of course, controversial and others have argued that testimony of this sort is not as unreliable as Lehrer suggests. We will not, however, consider such arguments here since if such testimony does turn out to be reliable then so much the better for our overall line of argument.

[55] For a parallel argument regarding aesthetic testimony see Robson, "Aesthetic Testimony": 7.

[56] Lehrer, *Wine and Conversation*, p. 186.

[57] Christopher Kennedy "Vagueness and Grammar," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 30 (2007): 1-45.

[58] Michael Glanzberg, "Context, Content and Relativism," *Philosophical Studies* 136 (2007): 1-29 and Jonathan Schaffer, "Perspective in Taste Predicates and Epistemic Modals," in *Epistemic Modality*, eds. Andy Egan and Brian Weatherson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 179-226.

[59] Where 'in general' is meant as a generic rather than taken to indicate universal quantification. Similar replies could be made to worries for taste-imony raised by someone attracted to relationalism about taste properties. For discussion of color relationalism see Jonathan Cohen, "Color Properties and Color Ascriptions: A Relationalist Manifesto," *The Philosophical Review* 113 (2004): 451-506.
[60] Malcolm Budd directs a parallel charge at sceptics concerning aesthetic testimony. See Malcolm Budd, "The Acquaintance Principle," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 386–92, at p. 391.
[61] Smith, "The Objectivity of Tastes and Tastings," p. 44.
[62] Ibid.
[63] For example a gustatory version of the story offered in Jon Robson (manuscript) "Norms of Belief and Norms of Assertion in Aesthetics."
[64] Meskin,"Aesthetic Testimony" and Robson, "Aesthetic Testimony and the Norms of Belief Formation."
[65] Earlier versions of this essay were presented at Kansas State University, the Northern Institute of Philosophy, the University of Antwerp and the University of Leeds—thanks to audiences at these talks for their comments and insights. Jonathan Cohen, Bence Nanay and Carolyn Korsmeyer provided helpful comments on earlier drafts of the paper. In addition, thanks are due to two anonymous referees and the editors of the journal for helpful comments on the penultimate version of the paper.