

Relativism, Faultlessness and Parity: Why we should be Pluralists about Truth's Normative Function

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Abstract

Some philosophers, like Mark Richard and Paul Boghossian, have argued against relativism that it cannot account for the possibility of faultless disagreement. However, I will contend that the objections they moved against relativism do not target its ability to account for the possibility of faultless disagreement per se. Rather, they should be taken to challenge its capacity to account for another element of our folk conception of disagreement in certain areas of discourse—what Crispin Wright has dubbed *parity*. What parity demands is to account for the possibility of coherently appreciating, within a committed perspective, that our opponent's contrary judgement is somehow on a par with our own judgement. Understood in this way, Boghossian's and Richard's objections put indeed considerable pressure on relativism—or so I will argue. I will consider John MacFarlane's attempt to resist their objections and I will show that, once their arguments are properly understood as targeting parity, the attempt is not successful. In the last section of the paper I will offer a diagnosis of what is at the heart of the relativist inability to account for parity—namely its assumption of a monistic conception of the normativity of truth.

Keywords: Truth, Relativism, Faultless Disagreement, Parity, Normative Pluralism.

1. Introduction

Anna and Marco decide to go to a new sushi restaurant downtown. They are both food lovers and they have had many past experiences of sushi together. Moreover, let us suppose that they have an impressive record of past agreements concerning the taste of sushi. On this occasion, however, Anna judges the sushi to be delicious while Marco disagrees, judging it to be not delicious. Quite surprised by their divergent judgements, they try the sushi again and yet they stick to their original judgements—Anna judging it to be delicious while Marco judging it to be not delicious. Given their backgrounds, they take this divergence in judgements at face value. In fact, they take themselves to be disagreeing about whether a particular piece of sushi is delicious or not. However, reflecting on the subject matter of their disagreement—what we might call *disagreement about basic taste*—they also believe that nothing important hinges on it. In fact, they think that because basic taste is such a subjective matter there is no sense in which the disagreement has to be settled by determining who is right and who is wrong. In other words, they believe that in such a situation there is no sense to be made of the idea that someone has to be mistaken in judging the way she does.

I take this piece of fiction to be a philosophically informed description of a possible scenario in which Anna and Marco disagree *faultlessly*. It does not matter whether Anna and Marco qua non-philosophers would describe their situation in the way I have just done, or whether they would immediately agree on such a description. We (philosophers) know well that folk are not used to make the kind of fine-grained distinction philosophers are acquainted with. All that is required here is that the description of the exchange between Anna and Marco I have just given has a certain initial degree of intuitive grip on us—qua competent speakers of English. And, for philosophers, what matters is to come up with a coherent and satisfactory theory of basic taste that explains, or explains away, the intuitive grip that the exchange between Anna and Marco, as just described, possesses.

Various proposals have been defended in the recent debate—various forms of contextualism, hybrid-expressivism, relativism, invariantism, etc.—to deal with the phenomenon of faultless disagreement. In this paper, I will not take a stand on which theory better explains, or explains away, the phenomenon.¹ What I would like to do, instead, is to discuss whether a certain form of relativism—in fact a neutral version between what MacFarlane dubs *non-indexical contextualism* and his own *assessment-sensitive relativism* (MacFarlane 2014)—can explain the phenomenon. In so doing, I will discuss a recent exchange between four philosophers whose respective works have shaped the debate on faultless

¹ See Ferrari 2016b, Ferrari and Wright (forthcoming).

disagreement: Paul Boghossian, John MacFarlane, Mark Richard and Crispin Wright. I will argue that while MacFarlane wins the battle against the charge pressed by Richard on the adequacy of relativism to explain faultless disagreement, it is not clear whether he also wins the war of making full sense of faultless disagreement. This is because, I will contend, it is not clear whether MacFarlane can satisfactorily explain an important aspect of that phenomenon—what Wright has called *parity*. The conclusion will then be that assessment-sensitive relativism might not be able to account for the full intuition behind faultless disagreement.²

2. Faultless Disagreement

Max Kölbel, who initiates the recent debate on faultless disagreement, defines the phenomenon in the following way:

A faultless disagreement (FD) is a situation where there is a thinker A, a thinker B, and a proposition (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 2003: 53-54).

How should we understand this characterization of faultless disagreement? In particular, how should we interpret the two key notions of *disagreement* and *fault* (or *mistake*)? Concerning the notion of disagreement, things are not so simple. There is an ongoing discussion about what notion of disagreement we should consider in evaluating the explanatory adequacy of competing semantic theories.³ As a result of that discussion, many have been persuaded that there is in fact a plurality of *explananda*, and thus that it is somehow misleading to talk of disagreement *as such*. However, for the purposes of this paper we do not need to engage in that debate. In fact, given the basic semantic assumptions that relativists make about the truth-aptness of judgments in the target domains, the kind of disagreement which is at issue in the characterization above is what we might call *propositional disagreement*.⁴ Two thinkers—Anna and Marco—propositionally

² To be fair, MacFarlane does not motivate his relativism by attempting to accounting for faultless disagreement, even though he is not completely insensitive to the issue.

³ See, for instance, MacFarlane 2014, Huvenes 2012 and Baker 2013. See also Ferrari 2016b.

⁴ There might be other kinds of disagreement as when, for instance, I am entertaining a dispute with my former self in relation to a situation where there is a judgement made at t1 and later, at t2, a retraction of that very judgement. Or there might be a situation where a judgement is opposed by another subject simply by rejecting it (or suspending judgement about it). A more encompassing notion of disagreement in terms of opposi-

disagree just in case Anna's judgement entails the negation of Marco's judgement (alternatively, just in case Anna believes a proposition that entails the negation of what Marco believes).⁵ With this clarification in hand, the phenomenon I am primarily interested in concerns the possibility of *propositional disagreements* in which neither thinker is at fault.

The notion of fault as well is open to many different interpretations. However, as for the case of the notion of disagreement, given certain background assumptions that relativists generally make, we can safely assume that the technical sense involved in the characterization of faultless disagreement above is a normative one. A thinker is committing a fault in believing a proposition *p* if and only if in so believing she is violating the relevant norms governing enquiry. What the *relevant* norms are is a matter of dispute. The three 'usual suspects' are truth, knowledge and justification.⁶ In this paper I will assume, with Kölbel and MacFarlane, that the main norm governing beliefs and enquiry is truth. Thus, we have something like the following general normative constraint governing enquiry:

(TR) A thinker T is correct to believe (or assert) that *p* if and only if *p* is true.⁷

With this in hand, we can rephrase our general definition of *normative fault* in the following way:

(NF) A thinker is making a mistake⁸ in believing a proposition *p* if, and only if, believing *p* is deemed incorrect by (TR)—i.e., if, and only if, *p* is not true.

That said, the relativist project is to offer a conception of relative truth which is able to account for the possibility of situations in which Anna believes a proposition *p*—that *this sushi is delicious*—Marco believes a proposition *q*—that *this sushi is not delicious*—which entails *not-p*, and neither Anna nor Marco are violating

tion of doxastic attitudes might be required in order to account for these cases as well. However, for the purposes of this paper, the simple characterisation of disagreement in terms of the semantic incompatibility of the propositions involved in the disagreement will do. A novel kind of pluralism about disagreement is developed in Moruzzi, S. (ms).

⁵ This naïve characterisation of propositional disagreement has to be refined in order to exclude cases of conflicting temporally/locationally neutral propositions as cases of genuine disagreement. See Ferrari 2016b.

⁶ Advocates of the truth-norm are, among many others, Weiner 2005, Shah and Velleman 2005. For a defence of the knowledge-norm see especially Williamson 2000, Ch. 11; Hawthorne 2004, and Smithies 2012. For a defence of the justification (or reasonableness) norm, see Lackey 2007 and Kvanvig 2009.

⁷ One point which is worth mentioning is that, although I am here considering the 'if and only if' version of the truth-rule, for those that have quibbles with the 'if' direction, the rule could be restricted to the 'only if' direction without compromising the main points of the paper.

⁸ I will use the notion of fault and that of mistake interchangeably.

(TR).

3. The Simple Deduction

There is a simple argument to show that propositional disagreement and faultlessness, in the way we have characterized these notions, are inconsistent. Such an argument is known in the literature as *The Simple Deduction*, and it goes as follows:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. A accepts P | [Assumption] |
| 2. B accepts not-P | [Assumption] |
| 3. A's and B's disagreement involves no mistake | [Assumption, FD] |
| 4. P | [Assumption] |
| 5. B is making a mistake | [2, 4, TR, NF] ⁹ |
| 6. Not-P | [4, 5, 3 <i>RAA</i>] |
| 7. A is making a mistake | [1, 6, TR, NF] |
| 8. It is not the case that A's and B's disagreement involves no mistake | [3, 5, 7 <i>RAA</i>]. ¹⁰ |

Line (3) in the argument above is meant to capture the assumption that the disagreement in question is faultlessness, and the conclusion of the argument is a disproof of that assumption—namely, that it is not the case that A's and B's disagreement involves no mistake. Assuming classical logic, from line (8) we can validly infer that either A is making a mistake or B is making a mistake. Propositional disagreement precludes normative faultlessness. What can be said in reply to this argument to rescue the possibility of faultless disagreements?¹¹ Alethic relativism seems to offer a very neat and simple solution—by relativizing truth they also relativize the judgement-truth norm and, consequently, the notion of being at fault. The general thought is that a judgement that p is in good standing if and only if p is true relative to the subject's perspective.¹² Thus, a subject is at fault just in case she judges something false relative to her perspective.

⁹ Strictly speaking step 5 follows from step 4 in virtue of these further steps:

- 4.1. P is true (4, T-schema)
- 4.2. Not-P is not true (4.1, bivalence).

The same, *mutatis mutandis*, holds for the inference from 6 to 7. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

¹⁰ Wright 2006: 41.

¹¹ One possibility is to reject classical logic for those domains where the phenomenon of faultless disagreement strikes as plausible. This line of reply is explored by Wright 2001, 2006. But see Shapiro and Taschek 1996 and Shapiro 2012 for some challenges.

¹² I am using the general notion of a perspective to be neutral as to whether the relevant context to which relativize truth is that of utterance or that of assessment.

4. Alethic Relativism

In recent philosophy of language two main versions of alethic relativism have crystallized: a moderate version, championed by Max Kölbel, and a more radical one recently defended by John MacFarlane. The view has been applied to various domains of discourse, including the domains of taste, epistemic modals, knowledge attributions, and the moral domain. For simplicity and easiness of exposition, in this paper I will focus exclusively on the application of relative truth to judgments of taste (e.g., judgments like “this sushi is delicious”).¹³

Both varieties have much in common, in particular they both take judgments in the taste domain to express truth-apt contents whose truth value is relative to the taste sensibility of an agent (either that of the speaker or that of the assessor). Despite these important similarities, there is a fundamental semantic difference between the two views, which is what makes MacFarlane's relativism *more radical* than Kölbel's. Assuming a broadly Kaplanian approach to semantics, such a difference consists in the fact that besides introducing non-standard parameters into the circumstances of evaluation—e.g., those tracking an agent's taste sensibility—MacFarlane introduces a non-standard context, which he calls the *context of assessment*. The specific semantic function of such a context is that of providing the default value for the various parameters in the circumstances. Whereas in Kaplan's original framework, as well as in Kölbel's more conservative extension of it, the context of use provides the default information for the evaluation of the truth of a sentence-in-context, in MacFarlane's framework the context of assessment fulfils that function. Although according to MacFarlane this difference is crucial to account for what he calls the *retraction phenomenon*, it won't matter for our purposes. This is because, when it comes to the normative significance of disagreement and the norms governing judging, the two frameworks give similar predictions (MacFarlane 2014: 102-106). The reason is that when we focus on judging, or the making of assertions, context of use and context of assessment coincide.¹⁴ An agent, in judging that *p*, is also assessing *p*'s truth relative to the context in which the judgement is performed. If we consider only the normative consequences of judging, we cannot tell the difference between the two theories. Thus, we should expect that the two make analogous

¹³ I am here focusing only on particular judgements of taste—i.e. judgements of the form “this (particular) piece of sushi is delicious”. General judgements of taste—i.e. “sushi is delicious (in general)” introduce an additional layer of complexity which can be avoided for present purposes.

¹⁴ MacFarlane focuses on assertions, but for present purposes it will not matter much.

predictions concerning the normative aspects of disagreement. In this respect, we can treat the two theories as on a par for the purposes of this paper. In what follows I will use the term ‘relativism’ in such a way as to cover both non-indexical contextualist variants as well as assessment-sensitive ones—call this *minimal relativism*.

What this minimal relativism amounts to—in the case of basic taste—is the idea that the truth of judgements in that domain is relative to the taste perspective¹⁵ of a subject—either the judge or the assessor. Thus, in this sense, truth is perspectival—it does not make sense to ask for whether a certain taste judgement is true independently of any given taste-perspective.

For reasons that will become clear in subsequent sections, it is important to note that relativists also allow for a non-relative, fully disquotational monadic truth predicate that operates within a given perspective—call this *truth simpliciter*. Once a subject is within a taste-perspective, she can make use of the truth simpliciter to make non-relative truth-ascriptions. This fact, as we will see, is going to be crucial in discussing the parity element of the faultless disagreement phenomenon.

5. Relativism and the Simple Deduction

How does relative truth help with respect to faultless disagreement and the Simple Deduction? By relativizing truth relativists also relativize (TR):¹⁶

(Rel-TR) A thinker A is correct to judge that p if and only if p is true relative to A’s perspective.

Since *that this sushi is delicious— p* —is true relative to Anna’s perspective, and *that this sushi is not delicious— q* —is true relative to Marco’s perspective, we have that Anna is correct in judging that p and Marco is correct in judging that q . In this way, both Anna and Marco are in compliance with (Rel-TR). Yet, they disagree

¹⁵ I am using the general notion of a *perspective* in order to be neutral with respect to the issue whether the relevant context to which relativize truth is that of utterance or that of assessment. Cf. Boghossian 2011: 65, Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009, Ch. 4.

¹⁶ One might think that it is not obvious that the relativist should move straightforwardly from TR to Rel-TR. It is at least conceivable that there be a relativist who, for some relativist judgement p , maintains TR and consequently judges anyone who believes not- p to be at normative fault—even if according to the standards of the interlocutor, not- p is true. There is also a view potentially open to the relativist according to which “person A is normatively at fault in believing not- p ” is *itself* a relativist judgement, one that is true in the mouth of someone whose standards endorse p , and false in the mouth of others. To see that this differs from Rel-TR, note that according to Rel-TR it is an absolute matter whether someone is normatively at fault in believing that p , while on this account it is a relative matter. However, neither options, although viable relativistic alternatives, help with the issue of parity. Many thanks to Dan Waxman for a discussion on this point.

since in the relativist framework we still have that Marco's judgement contradicts Anna's judgement. The Simple Deduction is thus effectively blocked at the step from 4 to 5. Hence—putting worries concerning what it means to follow a relativised judgement-norm aside—¹⁷at least with respect to the domain of judgments of taste, the logical possibility of faultless disagreement is accounted for.

6. Faultlessness & Parity

Even conceding to relativists that they have the tools to resist the Simple Deduction, one might argue that there is still an important aspect of the general intuition concerning disagreement about matters of taste that is left unexplained. What we are looking for is not only a demonstration of the logical consistency of propositional disagreement and normative faultlessness, but also an explanation of how such a fact can be coherently appreciated and expressed within a committed perspective taking part to the disagreement—i.e. consistently endorsed together with a thinker's own opinion on the subject matter of the disagreement. Wright calls this extra ingredient *parity*, and he characterises it as follows: “In effect, it is the requirement that faultlessness be appreciable, and endorsable, from the point of view not just of neutrals but of the committed parties in a dispute” (Wright 2012: 439). According to Wright, this feature of taste disagreement is “meant to be implicated by faultlessness—conveyed in the acknowledgment that *your opinion is just as good as mine*” (*Ibid.*, emphasis in the original).

There is an important difference between parity and faultlessness. Such a difference resides primarily on the different point of view that is involved. Whereas the evaluation of the faultlessness of a disagreement is made from within a neutral point of view—that of a referee external to the disagreement who does not take a stand on the topic of the disagreement—the evaluation of parity is carried out from within the committed perspectives of the judgers involved in the disagreement. For this reason, there is a clear sense in which accounting for parity requires more theoretical resources than accounting for the logical possibility of faultlessness. In fact, what it asks for is to make space for the permissibility within a committed perspective of a judgment to the effect that the disagreement is one that does not necessarily involve fault and, consequently, that the opponent is under no rational requirement to change her mind in the

¹⁷ On this point, see Marques 2014. Moreover, on the issue concerning whether it is rational to believe in a relativized judgement norm see Moruzzi 2009.

light of the disagreement.¹⁸

But why should a relativist care about this extra feature? Should not we be happy with an effective account for the logical possibility of faultless disagreement? Should not we just refuse to acknowledge this extra feature as part of the explanandum? This is an open possibility, but an inconvenient one. The reason why we should care about parity is that it seems to be an important part of our pre-theoretical conception of disputes about matters of taste. One might even argue that from a folk-theoretical point of view the parity feature is explanatory prior to the faultlessness feature. The idea is that what drives the more abstract thought concerning the faultlessness of certain disagreements about taste is the appreciation in many cases of actual confrontations about matters of taste that our opponent's judgement is, in some important respect, no less legitimate than mine. We want a theory of the normative significance of disagreement in the domain of taste that gives us—ordinary speakers engaging in everyday disputes about taste—the tools for accounting for this important aspect of the folk conception. Thus, if relativists want to stay in the game they must provide us with an explanation not only of the logical possibility of faultless disagreement but also of the parity feature of disagreements about taste.¹⁹

7. Boghossian and Richard on Relativism and Faultlessness

There are reasons to suspect that for relativists accounting for parity might not be as straightforward as accounting for the possibility of faultless disagreement. In fact, merely relativizing the truth norm does not seem to help with respect to

¹⁸ Strictly speaking, "Parity" involves two conditions: 1) that each of the disputants acknowledges the other not being at fault; 2) that they still maintain that there is a real disagreement. Another option could be to hold on a weaker notion of parity according to which it involves just the satisfaction of the first condition. After all, a way in which the disputants can acknowledge that none of them is at fault is to recognise that their opinions have non-contradictory contents. However, this contextualist-like move seems to undermine much of the motivation for a relativist semantics (either use- or assessment-sensitive), so I do not take it to be a viable option for a relativist. Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this point.

¹⁹ Another reason for this conclusion is that if a theory allows for faultlessness but not for parity, then whoever comes to believe in the parity condition is in error according to the theory. Thus, such a theory prescribes that a thinker must either have no view about parity or she must believe in its falsity. But believing in the falsity of the parity condition is a way to say that the relativistic doctrine cannot be taken as a real commitment—i.e. that judging from a perspective does not allow for conceding any ground to the opponent's view, contrary to what the doctrine predicts from an abstract point of view. In both cases, the broader conclusion is thus that a failure to accounting for parity has the consequence that the relative doctrine cannot be coherently endorsed by anyone having a committed perspective on the subject matter of the dispute. Many thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this point.

parity. In what follows I will review two similar arguments, one from Mark Richard and the other from Paul Boghossian, which show why relativism, as it stands, fails to account for parity. I will then consider MacFarlane's attempt to address these arguments for then arguing that such an attempt might not be effective in rescuing relativism from the parity challenge.

Richard and Boghossian have put forward arguments intended to cast doubt on the relativists' ability of accounting for the possibility of faultless disagreement. In fact, because neither Richard nor Boghossian was distinguishing between parity and faultlessness, they both take their respective arguments to show that relativizing truth, and consequently the truth-norm, does not suffice for a full explanation of the possibility of faultlessness. With the distinction between faultlessness and parity in hand, we can appreciate that taken as arguments against the possibility of faultless disagreements, they both fail. However, they can be effectively used to show that relativists are in trouble in giving an effective account of parity. Thus, in this section I will outline these arguments and I will use them to show that relativists cannot account for parity.

Richard, in introducing his own view concerning matters of taste, presses the following line of criticism against alethic relativism:

Suppose I think that Beaufort is a better cheese than Tome, and you think the reverse. Suppose (for *reductio*) that each of our thoughts is valid – mine is true from my perspective, yours is from yours. Then not only can I (validly) say that Beaufort is better than Tome, I can (validly) say that it is true that Beaufort is better than Tome. And of course, if you think that Tome is better than Beaufort and not vice versa I can also (validly) say that you think that it is not the case that Beaufort is better than Tome. So, I can (validly) infer that it is true that Beaufort is better than Tome though you think that Beaufort isn't better than Tome. From which it surely follows that you are mistaken – after all, if you have a false belief, you are mistaken about something. This line of reasoning is should no matter what the object of dispute. So, it is just wrong to think that if my view is valid - true relative to my perspective – and your contradictory view is valid - true, that is, relative to yours – then our disagreement is 'faultless' (Richard 2008: 132).²⁰

²⁰ Wright makes a similar point when he writes: "It is pretty immediate that Assessment-relativism is useless for the purpose of securing Parity. By its rules, I am constrained to assess your opinion in the light of my standards, rather than yours. So, of course, I will assess it as false. Since I assess my own as true, I can then, surely, hardly regard your opinion as just as good as mine, and Parity is surrendered from my point of view, the point of view of a participant in the dispute" (Wright 2012: 440). See also Boghossian 2011: 61-62.

The upshot of Richard's argument is that, even if we endorse a relativistic conception of truth, within a committed perspective a thinker is committed to evaluate a contrary opinion as false. And for that reason, she is committed to evaluate anybody holding such an opinion as being at fault in judging in a way she ought not to. From this, Richard concludes that the disagreement is not faultless.

Boghossian challenges alethic relativism in a very similar vein, offering an argument which he calls "The Argument from (Perspectival) Immersion" (Boghossian 2011: 62). The argument—as I intend it—goes roughly as follows:

1. The content of a taste proposition p is relatively true [Def. of Relativism]
 2. p is true within D 's perspective and D judges that p [Assumption]
 3. If D judges that p and p is true within D 's perspective, then D is correct in judging that it is true that p [Truth Simpl., TR]
 4. It is correct for D to judge that it is true that p [2, 3 MPP]
 5. If, within D 's perspective, it is true that p then, within D 's perspective, it is false that not- p [Logic of Truth Simpl.]
 6. Within D 's perspective it is false that not- p [2, 5 MPP]
 7. If within D 's perspective it is false that not- p , then D is correct in judging that it is false that not- p [Truth Simpl., TR]
 8. D is correct in judging that it is false that not- p [6, 7 MPP]
 9. If D is correct in judging that it is false that not- p , then, on pain of incoherence, D is correct in judging that anyone judging not- p (e.g., N) is making a mistake [TR, NF]
- Therefore,
10. D is correct in judging that N is making a mistake [8, 9 MPP]
 11. D is correct in judging that her disagreement with N is not faultless [10, FD]
 12. The disagreement between D and N is not faultless [1, 11 FD]

Steps from 1 to 8 seem hardly objectionable. Step 9 clearly requires some additional consideration since it is not straightforward at all why we should endorse it. I will return to it shortly.

The upshot of Boghossian's line of reasoning is that any speaker within a committed perspective can correctly evaluate anybody holding a contrary opinion as making a mistake and thus can correctly evaluate the disagreement as not faultless.

Boghossian, like Richard, takes the major conclusion of the argument to be that the disagreement itself is not faultless. However, both the conclusion expressed by the last sentence of Richard's argument, and the step from 11 to 12 in Boghossian's argument seem objectionable. My diagnosis of why this is so has to do with the fact that they fail to distinguish between parity and faultlessness. Granted that within a committed perspective any thinker has to evaluate a contrary judgement as false and granted that—pending an argument for line 9—anybody holding such an opinion is committing a mistake, we cannot conclude, without further argument, that the disagreement *itself* is one involving some fault on the part of either disputants. What we are allowed to conclude is that both disputants are licensed, from within their respective committed perspective, to evaluate their respective opponent as making a mistake in judging the way she does. But, even if we concede the argument until line 10, a relativist has reasons to resist the step from 11 to 12. In fact, the relativist at this point would insist that their doctrine gives us the resources to say that the disagreement between Anna and Marco is faultless. With the post-semantic notion of relative truth in hand the relativist can say that both Anna and Marco judge truly and thus faultlessly relative to their respective perspectives.

In this respect, even conceding that the argument from 1 to 10 is sound, the relativist could resist the conclusion 12 by pointing out that one thing is to provide a coherent explanation of why the disagreement itself is one that does not need to involve any fault—which relativist can offer—and another, far more demanding thing, is to provide an account of how each committed party can consistently assess her opponent's contrary opinion as faultless alongside with her own view on the subject matter at issue. And this is as it should be if the distinction between the parity and the faultlessness features is a significant one.

The point I am making in this section is that once the distinction between parity and faultlessness is acknowledged it seems clear that both Richard's and Boghossian's should not be taken as arguments against relativists' ability to account for the possibility of faultless disagreement. However, they might as well work as arguments showing that relativists are ultimately unable to account for parity. Whether a position's inability to account for parity translates *eo ipso* into an inability to account for faultlessness is something that requires argument.

With this in hand, in the next sections I will scrutinize both the soundness and dialectical effectiveness of these two arguments taken as targeting parity and not faultlessness. In doing so I will discuss a recent reply by John MacFarlane to Richard's line of reasoning which, if correct, would cast doubt also to Boghossian's argument. I will argue that MacFarlane's reply is not effective

against the parity objection—and this will require some discussion of step 5 in the argument from perspectival immersion.

8. MacFarlane's Reply

Quite predictably, MacFarlane attacks line 9 of my version of Boghossian's argument—i.e. it attacks the step from an attribution of falsity to a contrary judgement from within a perspective to an attribution of fault to the subject endorsing that opinion. According to MacFarlane this step is problematic because it presupposes a non-relative normative bridge principle between truth and norms governing judgement in the targeted domain. But once we take on board a normative principle broadly on the lines of (Rel-TR) according to MacFarlane, the step from 8 to 9 remains unsupported.

Moreover, in his reply to Richard's argument (MacFarlane 2012: 453), and later in his *Assessment Sensitivity* (MacFarlane 2014: 133-35), MacFarlane distinguishes between different senses of the expression "being at fault". Two senses are particularly relevant for our purposes. Under one understanding of "being at fault"—let's call it fault#1—a thinker S is at fault#1 in judging that p just in case in doing so she violates the constitutive norms governing judgement. Under the second understanding of "being at fault"—fault#2—S is at fault#2 in judging that p just in case it is not true that p —where the relevant notion of truth here is the intra-perspectival notion of truth simpliciter. With this distinction in hand, MacFarlane goes on to claim that although committed parties to a dispute should regard each other as being at fault#2 they need not regard each other as being at fault#1. In that respect, according to MacFarlane no sense can be made of the possibility of disagreement without fault#2, even though he thinks that within his assessment-sensitive framework sense can be made of the possibility of disagreement without fault#1. After all, it seems that appealing to the relative truth norm provides us with the tool to account for parity as well.

Unfortunately, things are not that simple. There are two sets of issues I would like to discuss: the first is whether, in fact, relativism can give us a satisfactory account of parity by appealing to the relative truth norm; the second concerns the normative relation between the two senses of 'being at fault' that MacFarlane distinguishes.

On the first point, I contend that it is not clear that appealing to the relative truth norm offers us an effective tool to account for parity. To see the point, let us reflect on Marco's contrary judgement from within Anna's committed perspective. The relative truth norm allows Anna to claim that Marco's judgement is not in violation of the norm because it is in accordance with his standard of

taste. In other words, Anna can claim that relative to his own standard of taste, Marco is judging correctly. So far so good. But is this enough to assuage the parity intuition? I doubt it. The question at this point is how Anna should assess Marco's standard of taste. What should she say about a standard of taste that permits the endorsement of a belief whose content she is committed to assess as false, from within her perspective? There seem to be only two sensible options. The first option is that she takes Marco's standard of taste to be inferior to her own. Although this option copes well with the intuitive idea that she has a commitment to her own standard of taste—and thus a commitment to prefer her standard over those that permits contrary judgements—it seems to preclude a full account of parity. Anna would find herself to endorse the following predicament concerning Marco's situation: "Your judgement is correct relative to your standard but your standard is inferior to mine". How can a judgement that is issued from an inferior standard—albeit correctly so—being on a par with a judgement that is correctly issued by a superior standard? It seems that the sense of parity that can be recovered from the relative truth rule in this scenario is rather flimsy and does not offer a satisfactory account of our pre-theoretical conception of parity. The second option available to Anna is to take Marco's standard of taste to be on a par with her own. In this respect relativism could give us a more substantive account of parity. Not only Anna is in a position to assess Marco's contrary judgement as correct relative to his own standard—she is also in a position to claim that because his standard is as good as her own the two judgements are really on a par. Parity would be accounted for. However, I wonder whether it is fully coherent for Anna to evaluate as equally good a standard of taste which permits the endorsement of a belief whose content contradicts that of Anna's belief, alongside with a full commitment to her own standard—and thus to her own judgement. In other words, attributing full credit and equal good-standing to a standard that permits the formation of a contrary judgement seems in tension with the idea that we have a full commitment to our own standard. This is no conclusive objection against relativism, but it is a call for a more detailed explanation of what a standard of taste is and, in particular, what are the normative consequences of endorsing a certain standard in terms of the assessment of contrary standards. Until we have a more detailed story about these issues, it is not clear that relativists can give us a satisfactory account of parity.

I now turn to a discussion of the second point—i.e. a discussion of what is exactly the relation between the two senses of 'being at fault' distinguished by MacFarlane. To be honest, I am not entirely sure what to make of this distinc-

tion. In particular, it is not clear to me what sense can be made of a notion of fault—i.e. fault#2—linked to a notion—intra-perspectival truth—which plays no role in what MacFarlane takes to be the constitutive norms governing judgement. Given that the notion of fault is a notion intimately connected with normative evaluation, it is hard to understand what is the intended sense of fault#2. In other words, fault#2 can indeed be understood as a notion of fault only if intra-perspectival truth and falsity are taken to be somehow linked to the constitutive norms governing judgements. But this manoeuvre would reopen the question whether relativists can address the parity objection. In particular, something should be said about what exactly is the relation between these two notions of fault in connection with their normative significance. Given that they are both tied to the normative assessment of judgements one might wonder which of these notions have normative priority. I will return to this point in the next section.

The easiest option here for MacFarlane would be to deny that the intra-perspectival notions of truth and falsity carry any normative punch. In particular, he would have to deny that an intra-perspectival attribution of falsity to a contrary judgement licenses any attribution of normative fault. This would amount to claim that fault#2 is not really an interesting notion of fault. The trouble here is that, as we will see in the next section, there seems to be independent reason to maintain that intra-perspectival truth and falsity—even when construed in a purely deflationary fashion—function properly as norms of judgement. If that is correct, any attribution of falsity within a committed perspective engenders an attribution of fault. Hence the parity objection would still be effective.

9. Parity, the Normativity of Truth and Alethic Relativism

That truth always plays a normative function on judgement is established by an argument originally given by Crispin Wright against the deflationary conception of truth. Deflationists claim that since truth has no nature it cannot be a normative notion. Wright shows that by using the very same principles that deflationists accept—foremost the equivalence schema²¹ and the thesis that truth is primarily a device for expressing endorsement of a proposition or a collection of propositions—together with some uncontroversial assumptions about the logic

²¹ In its propositional form, the schema is as follows: (ES) $\langle p \rangle$ is true if and only if p —where ' $\langle \rangle$ ' is a device for referring to the proposition expressed by the sentence encapsulated, and ' p ' is a schematic letter for a sentence. Like Horwich (1998), we understand the biconditional in (ES) as a material biconditional.

of negation and the biconditional, we can prove that truth is a norm of judgement.

Wright's argument comes in two stages. The first stage establishes that truth and justification coincide in terms of positive normative force. A reason to regard a proposition as justified is a reason to endorse it as belief, and conversely. Moreover, a reason to endorse a proposition as belief is, by the equivalence schema, a reason to regard the proposition as true, and conversely. Thus, a reason to regard a proposition as justified is a reason to regard it as true, and conversely (Wright 1992: 18). This establishes that both truth and justification are norms of judgement.

The second stage of the argument is purported to show that truth and justification are different norms of judgement. This has to do with the fact that truth and justification potentially diverge in extension. Intuitively, a proposition can be true without being justified and, conversely, a proposition can be justified without being true. Formally, this can be shown by first noticing that truth commute with negation within the scope of the biconditional in the equivalence schema. In other words, it can be shown that truth satisfies the following negation equivalence:

(NE) $\langle p \rangle$ is not true if and only if $\langle \text{not } p \rangle$ is true.²²

However, the corresponding principle with justification does not hold:

(NE-J) $\langle p \rangle$ is not justified if and only if $\langle \text{not-}p \rangle$ is justified.

This failure is due to the possibility of neutral states of information—a subject *S* is in an epistemically neutral situation with respect to her informational state *i* and to a proposition $\langle p \rangle$ just in case *i* provides *S* with neither a justification for $\langle p \rangle$ nor a justification for $\langle \text{not-}p \rangle$. Relative to an epistemically neutral state of information, both $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \text{not-}p \rangle$ fall outside the extension of 'justified'. Moreover, if independently of any state of information either $\langle p \rangle$ or $\langle \text{not-}p \rangle$ fall nonetheless in the extension of 'true', we can infer that truth and justification potentially diverge in extension. Because of this potential divergence in extension, truth and justification cannot be the same norm. Thus, truth has to be a *sui generis* norm of judgement—i.e. a norm of judgement independent of justification. Intuitively, there is one kind of bad-standing in judging that *p* when *p* is not justified relative to the subject's informational state—regardless of whether *p* is true or not. And there is a *different* kind of bad-standing in judging that *p* when

²² *Proof:* (1) $\langle p \rangle$ is true if, and only if, *p* [equivalence schema]; (2) $\langle p \rangle$ is not true if, and only if, not *p* [from 1 by contraposition]; (3) $\langle \text{not } p \rangle$ is true if, and only if, not *p* [from 1 by substituting $\langle p \rangle$ with $\langle \text{not-}p \rangle$]; (4) $\langle p \rangle$ is not true if, and only if, $\langle \text{not } p \rangle$ is true [from 2 and 3 by transitivity].

p is false—regardless of whether the subject has justification for judging that p.²³

The upshot of this for our discussion is that as soon as we endorse the basic commitments about truth that deflationists are happy to endorse, we cannot deny that truth plays a normative role with respect to judgements. Since there is no reason to deny that the intra-perspectival, fully transparent, notion of truth that MacFarlane introduces in what he calls the semantic proper obeys to the basic commitments characterising the deflationary conception of truth, there's no reason to deny that such a notion exert a *sui generis* normative constraint on judgement. This means that there must be, after all, a normative sense of being at fault (being at fault#2) that goes hand in hand with an attribution of intra-perspectival falsity. The question of whether relativism can account for parity is thus still open.

If this line of thought is correct, it puts considerable pressure on relativists to say something more about what is the relationship in terms of normative function between the truth-simpliciter norm and the relative-truth norm. In particular, it seems that the above arguments show that MacFarlane is committed to claim that in terms of normative significance the relative-truth norm always trumps the truth-simpliciter norm. Although I believe that this is, in principle, a viable option, some argument is required on the relativist side in order to show that this line is ultimately stable. That said, in what follows I would like to briefly explore an alternative route. I will assume for the time being that both the relative-truth norm and the truth-simpliciter norm function normatively over judgements, and they do so independently of each other. One could motivate the need of a relative-truth norm over and above the truth-simpliciter norm on pragmatic grounds—as MacFarlane seems to suggest (MacFarlane 2014, Ch.5). But then the pressing question would be: how should we interpret the normative function of the truth-simpliciter norm in such a way to allow for a decent notion of parity? An answer to this question will be the topic of the next section.

10. What Kind of Fault?

To briefly recap: what the above discussion shows us is that if we take judgements of taste to express truth-apt contents which are, modulo standard indexicality, semantically invariant across contexts of use/assessment—call this *minimalist taste semantics*—then we have no option but to say that a commitment to assess a contrary judgement as false is *ipso facto* a commitment to attribute (some

²³ For a more detailed discussion of this point see Ferrari 2016c and, especially, Ferrari and Moruzzi (ms1) and (ms2).

kind of) fault to any subject endorsing it. The nature of this error-attribution is epistemic—or, more properly, alethic given the normative contrast just noticed between truth and justification.

The crucial question at this point is: how serious is this attribution of fault? Generally, the normative function that truth exerts on judgements is taken to be quite substantive—in fact, to express a deontic requirement. In particular, some of the philosophers who take truth to be the norm of judgement would endorse the claim that in judging falsely a thinker is doing something (alethically) impermissible. MacFarlane is no exception to this trend.²⁴ In fact, he cashes the truth-rule out in terms of permissibility/impermissibility to the effect that if S judges that p and p is untrue then S is doing something impermissible (MacFarlane 2014: 103). However, understanding truth's normative function rigidly in deontic terms seems to preclude the possibility of rescuing an interesting notion of parity in some domains—e.g. the domain of taste. This is because a commitment to assess a contrary judgement as false would engender—regardless of which domain that judgement belongs to—a commitment to attribute substantive fault—i.e., an impermissibility-entailing type of fault—to anybody holding that judgement. But this seems utterly too strong a prediction in the case of basic taste.²⁵

Thus, in order to account for an interesting notion of parity in the taste domain we need to weaken the sense of fault which can be legitimately attributed to a contrary view on matters of taste. In other words, what we need is a way of defending the thesis that no *substantive* fault need to be attributable to a subject holding a view we are deemed to assess false. If this can be done, a decent sense of parity can be rescued. More precisely, one could argue that if sense can be made within a minimalist taste semantics of the following combination of thoughts—your judging that not-p is incorrect, because false, but there is no sense in which your judgement is any worse than mine or a judgement you ought not to have—then we could claim that there is a good sense of parity that can be preserved, despite the arguments discussed above. In what follows I will briefly outline how a proposal along these lines can be developed.²⁶

The first step is to notice that when we say that truth exerts a normative constraint on judgement we could mean one or more of the following things:

CRITERIAL It is correct (fitting) to judge that p (if and) only if p is true.

²⁴ See also Gibbard 2005 and Wedgwood 2007.

²⁵ For similar consideration concerning the normative significance of retraction in various domains of discourse, see Ferrari and Zeman 2014.

²⁶ For a more detailed account and defence of how this should be done, see Ferrari 2016a and especially Ferrari, F. (ms).

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- AXIOLOGICAL It is valuable (good) to judge that p (if and) only if p is true.
DEONTIC One ought to judge that p (if and) only if p is true.

These are three distinct dimensions of the normative constraint that truth can exert on judgment.²⁷ With this in hand, I call a normative alethic principle any principle expressing the normative constraint that truth exerts on judgment in terms of one or more of the three aforementioned dimensions—i.e. criterial, axiological, and deontic. It is important to appreciate the fact that the notion of a normative alethic principle so defined allows for some flexibility. In this sense, the account sketched here can be properly seen as a form of *normative pluralism* concerning truth's normative function.

The second step is to maintain that parallel to the threefold distinction in truth's normative function we have a plurality of ways in which someone holding a view that is judged untrue might be said to be at fault. Thus, we have the following three categories of attribution of fault:

- DEONTIC FAULT In judging not-p the subject is judging in a way she ought not to.
AXIOLOGICAL FAULT In judging not-p the subject is doing something disvaluable.
CRITERIAL FAULT In judging not-p the subject is judging incorrectly.

Although I will not argue for this here (See Ferrari (ms)), I assume that these three categories of attribution of fault are independent of each other—in particular, that criterial fault does not entail either deontic or axiological fault. With this in hand, we have open the possibility of there being a domain of discourse—e.g. basic taste—in which truth's normative function is limited to the criterial aspect and thus in which the only legitimate attribution of fault is the criterial one. This would mean that although Anna (Marco) is committed to assess Marco's (Anna's) contrary judgement as false and incorrect she (he) can nevertheless coherently claim that Marco's (Anna's) judgement is in no sense worse than her (his) own, nor a judgement he (she) ought not to have. In this way, sense can be made of the thought that when it comes to matter of taste no opinion is either impermissible or any worse than any other—provided, of course, that such an opinion sincerely reflects the author's gustatory sensibilities. An interesting sense of parity with respect to matters of taste can thus be rescued, consistently with our minimalist taste semantics.

11. Conclusions

²⁷ For a defence of this point see Ferrari 2016a and Ferrari (ms).

Where does this leave us with respect to alethic relativism? I have argued that by introducing a post-semantic relative notion of truth, relativists are in a position to account for the possibility that a certain kind of disagreement about matters of taste is faultless. From a standpoint which is neutral with respect to the subject matter at issue in the disagreement—let us say, the standpoint of an uncommitted relativist—having relative truth in the theoretical toolkit allows us to say that neither party has to be at fault.

However, I have also argued with Boghossian and Richard that relativism might not deliver us everything we want. There is an element at the core of the faultlessness intuition about basic taste—what Wright has called *parity*—which relativists might have troubles in accounting for. I have claimed that we should keep questions concerning the possibility of faultless disagreement distinguished from questions concerning the possibility of parity. With this distinction in hand I have argued that both Boghossian's and Richard's arguments might be effective as arguments against relativists' inability of accounting for parity—even though they fail as arguments against faultlessness.

I have then relied on an argument given by Wright in *Truth and Objectivity* to draw a general lesson from the exchange between MacFarlane, Boghossian and Richard—namely that if we take judgements of taste to express truth-apt contents which are, modulo standard indexicality, invariant across contexts of use/assessment, then we have no option but to say that a commitment to assess a contrary judgement as false is *ipso facto* a commitment to attribute (some kind of) error to any subject endorsing it. Thus, a full notion of parity seems precluded by our minimal semantic assumption.

However, I have argued that we should not despair—that an interesting notion of parity can be rescued once we introduce some distinctions concerning truth's normative function on judgement and thus concerning the kind of fault legitimately attributable, from within a committed point of view, to someone holding a contrary judgement. I have offered a brief outline to show how this can be done and I have concluded that such a proposal can indeed give us an interesting notion of parity—which is, I think, all we can hope for. Moreover, and crucially, this proposal can be implemented within an assessment sensitive framework and would offer relativists an effective tool to assuage the parity objection alongside with a tool, provided by the post-semantic relative notion of truth, to account for faultlessness.

That said, a crucial question remains whether relativism is still needed after all, or whether we can do a good enough job with a minimalist semantics, in line with that elaborated by Wright in *Truth and Objectivity*, coupled with the

normative pluralism framework offered here.²⁸ However, I must leave a discussion of this point for another occasion.²⁹

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²⁸ See Ferrari and Wright (forthcoming) and Ferrari (ms).

²⁹ Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Sebastiano Moruzzi and Erik Stei for their extensive written comments on the penultimate version of this paper. A first version of it was written during my tenure of a postdoctoral fellowship in the Leverhulme Trust funded project, “Relativism and Rational Tolerance”—held at the former Northern Institute of Philosophy in Aberdeen—I would like to thank everybody at NIP for the many occasions in which they have helped me and supported my research. In particular, I would like to thank Patrick Greenough, Nikolaj Pedersen, Eva Picardi and Crispin Wright for insightful discussions on these topics over the past few years. The final version of this paper has been written during my tenure of a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Bonn, within the project “Disagreement in Philosophy”, sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG—BR 1978/3–1). I gratefully acknowledge the support of these funding bodies. Thanks also to two anonymous referees from *Argumenta* for their precious comments.

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