

To appear in J. Wyatt, J. Zakkou, and D. Zeeman (eds): *Perspectives on Taste*. Routledge

Tastes and the Ontology of Impersonal Perception Reports

Friederike Moltmann

October 12, 2021

Introduction

This paper is about what I will call *impersonal taste reports* as in (1) as well as other *impersonal perception reports* such as (2):

- (1) a. Chocolate tastes good.
- b. Chocolate is delicious.
- (2) a. The photo looks good.
- b. The violin sounds strange.
- c. The perfume smells as if it was from Guerlain.
- d. It feels as if it is going to rain.

The standard semantic view about such sentences is that the predicates stand for a subjective relation of experience or evaluation between objects and experiencers (judges). This relation is generally used to explain the possibility of faultless disagreement about judgments of taste. It underlies standard contextualist and relativist accounts of sentences about judgments of personal taste, as well as the generic version of the semantics of taste sentences proposed in Moltmann (2010).

This paper will argue for a different semantics of impersonal taste reports and impersonal perception reports in general. This semantics is based on a richer ontology of what I will call *taste occurrences* and *taste objects* and more generally *perceptual occurrences* and *perceptual objects*. The semantics will not involve experiencers or judges as implicit arguments of the perceptual relations expressed by the predicates in (1) and (2) or even as arguments that are syntactically realized by silent elements (*pro*), thus avoiding the problems pointed by Collins (2013).

The ontological distinction between perceptual occurrences and perceptual objects is reflected in semantic differences between verbal and nominal predicates: verbal taste predicates take perceptual occurrences as arguments: nominal and adjectival taste predicates take perceptual objects as arguments.

The ontology of taste occurrences and objective tastes allows dispensing with implicit experiencer arguments. Perceptual occurrences are entities that by nature have an experiencer, and in their choice of an experiencer show a particular first-person orientation. More precisely, impersonal perception verbs show a logophoric behavior, which parallels that of generic *one*: the experiencer is understood either as the speaker, the described attitude bearer, or anyone the speaker or described attitude bearer identifies with or simulates (on the generic reading).

Not just perceptual occurrences have a first-person orientation, but also the objects of perception themselves may, namely agent-centered situations of the sort sentences like (2e) are about.

In contrast to taste occurrences, taste objects are ‘objective’ or public and do not involve a particular individual as experiencer. They are the sorts of things we refer to explicitly with taste nouns as in *the taste of coffee*, and they are also the things involved in the semantics of taste adjectives such as *delicious*. On the proposed semantics, faultless disagreement of sentences involving taste objects such as (1b) resides in the first-person based evaluation of a taste object, rather than the perceptual experience itself.

The paper will first address semantic differences between nominal/adjectival taste predicates and verbal ones, and then outline the ontology of perceptual occurrences and perceptual objects as well the semantics of impersonal perception reports with the two sorts of predicates. At the end, it will address the question of what sorts of predictions the present approach makes regarding faultless agreement.

1. Standard semantics of sentences expressing personal taste

The general assumption is that taste predicates express a subjective, experiential relation that holds between an object (or kind of object) and an agent *a*, the experiencer or ‘judge’, so that (3a) has the logical form in (3b):¹

¹ There is another view on which the experiencer or judge is part of the context of assessment, requiring reassessment by anyone evaluating the sentences as true or false (McFarlane 2014, Lasersohn 2005). Then, *tasty* denotes a property of objects, with judges acting as parameters of evaluation besides *s*, as below:

- (3) a. Coffee tastes good.
 b. tastes good(coffee, a)

Doubts whether such simple contextualist or relativist analyses can explain the phenomenon of faultless disagreement have motivated a more complex analysis of (3a) in terms of first-person-based genericity, involving simulation (Moltmann 2010, 2012). A simplified version of that analysis is given for (3a) below, for Gn being a suitable generic operator:

- (4) a. Everyone as someone the speaker identifies with has a good-tasting experience of coffee.
 b. $\lambda x[\text{Gn } y \text{ taste good to}(\text{coffee}, y \text{ qua someone } x \text{ identifies with } y)]$

The property in (4a) needs to be self-applied by anyone accepting the content of the sentences.

Support for the involvement of genericity in taste statements such as (1a) comes from the possibility of co-variation of the ‘judge’ with generic *one* or arbitrary PRO, as in (5a) and (5b) respectively:

- (5) a. When *one* drinks milk cold, it tastes *pro* good.
 b. It is pleasant *pro* PRO_{arb} to sit on the sofa.

In what follows, I will assume that taste sentences such as (3a) display both a generic reading, along the lines of (4b), as well as a first-person-oriented non-generic reading on which the speaker (or described agent) just conveys her own taste judgment. The latter, given the standard assumption about taste predicates and a standard, Lewisian account of *de se*, would be represented as below:

- (4) c. $\lambda x[\text{tastes good}(\text{coffee}, x)]$.

2. Verbal, adjectival, and nominal taste predicates

(i) $[\text{tasty}(\text{coffee})]^{w, t, a} = \text{true}$ iff coffee is tasty to a in w at t

2.1. An individual level- stage level distinction among taste predicates

Judgments of taste take different linguistic forms, and they go along with somewhat different readings. In particular, *verbal taste predicates* as in (6a) display different readings from *adjectival taste predicates* as in (6b):

- (6) a. The coffee tastes delicious.
 b. The coffee is tasty.

Pearson (this volume) points out that verbal taste predicates permit non-generic readings, namely a first-person referential reading and bound-variable readings, which is because verbal taste predicates are ‘stage-level’. By contrast, adjectival taste predicates always display a generic reading, which for her means that they are ‘individual-level’.

Pearson lists various manifestations of the individual-level/stage-level distinction among taste predicates. One of them is the possibility of adverbial modifiers, which are excluded by individual-level predicates:

- (7) a. The tea tastes good in a China cup.
 b. ??? The tea is tasty in a China cup.
 c. St Pauls’ looks beautiful today.
 d. ??? St Paul’s is beautiful today.

Moreover, floated *all* gets a reading with verbal taste predicates on which it ranges over situations, but with adjectival taste predicates on which it ranges over the relevant individuals:

- (8) a. Pineapples always taste good. (in all situations)
 b. Pineapples are always tasty. (all of them)

Another diagnostics for the individual/stage-level distinction is *when*-clauses, generally taken to be restricted to stage-level predicates:

- (9) a. When St Paul’s looks beautiful, ...
 b. ??? When St Paul’s is beautiful, ...

For Pearson, adjectival taste predicates being ‘individual level’ means that they are always generic, involving a generic operator with just scope over the predicate at logical form (Chierchia 1995). Thus, whereas (10a) has a first-person referential reading as in (10b) as well as a generic reading involving a wide-scope generic operator as in (10c), (11a) requires a generic operator taking scope just over the predicate as in (11b):

(10) a. This cake tastes good

b. Gn_i [this cake tastes good (to) pro_i]

c. [tastes good (to)](this cake, speaker)

(11) a. This cake is tasty.

b. This cake [Gn_i [is tasty pro_i]]

c. For any entity d , [Gn_i [is tasty pro_i]](d) = 1 iff x is tasty to everyone in any (relevant) situation.

There are several issues, however, that arise for this account of adjectival and verbal taste predicates.

First of all, the account does not give a compositional semantics of complex taste predicates like *tastes good* and in particular fails to give justice to the contribution of the secondary predicate *good*.

Second, the account does not explain the stage-level/individual-level correlation with verbal and adjectival taste predicates. Adjectives themselves, as is well-known, are not generally individual-level. *Available*, *apparent*, *unwell*, *happy* are stage-level, for example. There are also adjectives that can be used for taste judgments that fail to be individual-level, for example *terrible* and *stimulating*, predicates that focus on the effect on the experiencer. Such adjectives pattern with stage-level predicates given the various diagnostics, as indicated below:

(12) a. When I drank it at room temperature, the wine was terrible.

b. When I drink coffee in the morning, it is stimulating; when I drink it at night it puts me to sleep.

Third, the account fails to carry over to the semantics of taste nouns and nouns denoting perceptual objects: *the taste of coffee*, *the look of St Paul's*, *the smell of the perfume*, *the*

sound of the violin display only a sort of generic reading, not a reading relating to a particular perceptual occurrence. In the next section, we will discuss the nominal construction in greater detail and see that its semantics can also shed light on the first and second issue with Pearson's account.

Fourth, the account hinges on treating taste predicates in impersonal taste reports as involving an experiencer argument, syntactically realized by a silent element *pro*. However, there is little if any linguistic evidence for judge or experiencer arguments of predicates in impersonal taste sentences, as Collins (2013) has argued. This also holds for other predicates of perception in impersonal perception reports.

Finally, Pearson's account fails to capture the first-person orientation or logophoric character of impersonal perception verbs, an issue I will turn to now.

2.2. The logophoric nature of verbal taste predicates

Verbal taste predicates differ from adjectival ones not only in their stage-level as opposed to individual-level behavior, but also in displaying a particular first-person-orientation or logophoric character. Pearson (this volume) notices that a first-person covert indexical reading is available for verbal taste predicates, but not adjectival ones, an observation that generalizes to all impersonal perception verbs:

(13) a. When I am hungry, beans taste good.

b. ?? When I am hungry, beans are tasty.

(14) a. When put in a long vase, a single rose looks nice.

b. ?? When put in a long vase, a single rose is nice-looking.

A related observation is that a first-person bound-variable reading with generic *one* as antecedent is available only with verbal taste predicates and not adjectival ones:

(15) a. When one is hungry, beans taste good.

b. ?? When one is hungry, beans are tasty.

Impersonal perception verbs need not relate to the speaker, though. In contexts embedded under attitude verbs, they will relate to whoever is the described agent. They may do so displaying a referential reading (14a) or bound variable reading (14b):

- (16) a. John found that the cake tasted good.
 b. Everyone who ordered wine was upset that the wine did not taste good.

Taste occurrences still relate to the speaker when the taste predicate is not embedded under an attitude verb, as in (17):

- (17) Everyone is drinking wine that tastes good.

The same generalization holds for predicates of other perceptual modes, illustrated by the following contrast:

- (18) a. Everyone who looked at the picture from the entrance was angry that the picture did not look good.
 b. Everyone stood next to a picture that did not look good.

With respect to the perceptual occurrences they describe, impersonal perception verbs thus behave like logophoric pronouns, and also generic *one*, in relating to the speaker or else whoever is the bearer of the relevant described attitude. Impersonal perception verbs differ in that respect from ordinary perception verbs (*see, hear* etc), which fail to display such logophoricity. Capturing the latter is an important condition for an adequate semantics of impersonal perception verbs.

3. Taste occurrences and other perceptual occurrences

3.1. The linguistic form of impersonal verbal perceptual reports

On the present view, taste verbs denote relations between entities and taste occurrences, and adjectival taste predicates relations between entities and taste objects. Neither involves experiencers as arguments. That is because the ontology of taste objects and other perceptual objects permits dispensing with experiencer arguments. Perceptual occurrences are dependent on or directed toward a particular experiencer. If impersonal verbs of perception denote relations between entities and perceptual occurrences, they won't require experiencer arguments for semantic reasons. By contrast, perceptual objects do not depend on particular

experiencers. If adjectival taste predicates denote relations between entities and taste objects, an obligatory generic reading of adjectival predicates will follow without making use of experiencers.

If impersonal perception predicates denote relations between entities and perceptual occurrences or perceptual objects, such as tastes, looks, sounds, and smells, this permits a compositional semantics of complex predicates such as *taste good* or *look nice*. But first a few remarks are in order about such predicates.

Impersonal perceptual reports with a verbal predicate are of the form DP V XP, where V is an impersonal perception verb (*look, sound, smell*) and XP an obligatory adverbial modifier or secondary predicate. Though obligatory, the secondary predicate occupies the very same position as other adverbial modifiers. XP can be any expression that can also act as an adverbial. The adverbial modifier, on the present view, always expresses a property to be predicated of the perceptual occurrence. Impersonal perception reports then will involve existential quantification over perceptual occurrences and predication of the secondary predicate of the perceptual occurrences. For an impersonal taste report such as (19a) this is given in (19b):

(19) a. The cake tastes good.

b. $\exists d(\text{taste}(\text{the cake}, d) \ \& \ \text{good}(d))$

In (19b), no use was made of event arguments. That is because the issue of event arguments is rather independent of the argument in favor of perceptual occurrences and perceptual objects.²

The sort of analysis in (19b) will also be the semantics impersonal perceptual reports with other types of

The generic reading of verbal impersonal perceptual reports does not involve a distinct entity, but rather a generic operator, which one may assume, ranges just over situations suitably restricted. Thus, on the generic reading, the logical form of (19a) will be:³

² There is a connection of course between taste occurrences and taste events: taste occurrences may be regarded as results of taste experiences, just as judgments are results of acts of judging and conclusions results of acts of concluding. On that view, the logical form of (19a) would be as below:

(i) $\exists e(\text{taste}(e, \text{the coffee}) \ \& \ \text{good}(\text{result}(\text{the coffee})))$

³ There is a discussion whether generically quantified sentences of this sort require actual instances or not (see Dinges/Zakkou 2020 for arguments that they do).

(20) $G_n \exists d(\text{taste}(\text{the cake}, d) \ \& \ \text{good}(d))$

The secondary predicate of impersonal perception reports may also be *as if*-clauses and *like*-clauses, which in general can fill in the position of optional as well as selected adverbials:⁴

(21) a. John walks as if he was drunk

b. John behaves like he was being hunted.

(22) a. This looks / tastes / smells / sounds as if it was very old.

b. The landscape looks like it had not rained for weeks.

The semantics of *as if*-clauses and *like*-clauses is more complex of course (see Bledin/Srinivas to appear for a recent discussion and possible-worlds-based analysis). The ontology of perceptual occurrences promises a new analysis along the following lines, where *f* is a function mapping a set of situations [S] (the truthmakers of S) and an entity *d* to the kind of looks occurrences that are part of minimal extensions of the situations in [S] by including looks occurrences:

(23) a. *d* looks as if S

b. For a perceptual occurrence *e*, $\text{look}(d, e)$ and *e* that is similar to the kind of perceptual occurrence that matches the situational content of S.

c. $\exists e(\text{look}(e, d) \ \& \ e \sim f([S], d, \text{look}))$

3.2. The nature of taste occurrences

Taste occurrences are concrete qualities borne by taste experiences. Taste occurrences are thus dependent on the experience and its experiencer. The identity and existence of taste occurrences obviously depends on the agent. If I did not taste the coffee, the coffee did not taste good to me. The properties of taste occurrences are different though from the experience

⁴ *As if*-clauses also permit co-variation of generic *one* with the experiencer of the described perceptual occurrences:

(i) The massage feels as if one was being tortured.

itself. The experience, for example, has temporal properties, but the taste occurrence won't. A taste experience can occur unintentionally or by mistake, but this is not what one would attribute to the taste occurrence. The taste occurrence only has qualitative properties, such as being sour, bitter, or sweet, which one would not attribute to the taste experience itself. It is not obvious how exactly the relation between a taste occurrence and a taste experience should be conceived, and how their relation should possibly be reflected in impersonal taste sentences. The relation might possibly be conceived as one between an event and its result, as is suggested by German resultative morphology for taste occurrences (*schmecken* – to taste, *Geschmack* – taste). In this paper, I will set aside taste experiences and take impersonal taste predicates to only take a taste occurrence as an argument.

Other perceptual modes likewise come with perceptual occurrences besides perceptual experiences. Subjective looks are qualities borne by visual experiences, sound occurrences are qualities borne by auditory experiences, smell occurrences are qualities borne by olfactory experiences. Again, the properties of the occurrences are obviously different from those of the experiences.

(20) does not yet capture all there is to the semantics of impersonal perception verbs. In particular, it does not account for [1] the logophoric character of impersonal perception verbs and [2] the possibility of generic readings, and in particular covariation with generic *one*.

Impersonal perception verbs describe perceptual occurrences that relate either to the speaker or in contexts embedded under attitude verbs the attitude bearer. It thus relates to a context that is centered on an intentional agent and can be shifted under embedding under attitude verbs. In this paper, I will make use only of very basic, familiar tools of semantic analysis, leaving a possibly more accurate semantic analysis of the phenomenon to a future occasion. I will assume that sentences are evaluated with respect to two contexts: a context u , the utterance context, and a context c , the context of evaluation that may be shifted for sentences embedded under attitude verbs. Both contexts, for present purposes, are identified with a triple consisting of a situation or world s , a time t , and an agent a . Thus, for a context c s_c will be the situation in c , t_c the time in c , and a_c the agent in c . Attitude reports shift the context c to one in which the agent is the described attitude holder, as indicated below for *believe*, making use, for present purposes, of a Hintikka-style semantics of belief reports:

(24) For contexts u and c , and an individual a' ,

$[believe\ that\ S]^{u,c}(a') = 1$ iff for all s' , $s' R_{believe,ac} s_c$ $[S]^{u,c'} = 1$, where c' is like c except that $s_c = s'$ and $a_c = a'$.

Let us take H to be the relation of ‘having’ or bearerhood that holds between an agent and a perceptual occurrence. Then impersonal perception verbs will be subject to the following condition:

(25) Logophoric condition on impersonal perception verbs

For an impersonal verb of perception V,

for contexts u and c, $[V]^{u,c} = \{ x \mid \exists d (\langle x, d \rangle \in [V]^{u,c} \ \& \ H(d, a_c)) \}$

(19a) will now have the truth conditions below:

(26) $[the \ cake \ taste \ good]^{u,c} = 1$ iff $\exists d (\ ([the \ cake]^{u,c}, d) \in [tastes]^{u,c} \ \& \ H(d, a_c) \ \& \ d \in [good]^{u,c})$

Let us then turn to the generic reading of impersonal perception reports as well as the semantics of generic *one*. I will assume that on the generic reading, impersonal perception reports will involve a generic operator Gn which will shift not only the situation s_c of the context of evaluation c, but also the agent a_c in c, as below, where R is a suitable relation restricting the situations of evaluation:

(27) The generic reading of impersonal perception reports

For an impersonal perception verb V, a definite NP Y, and a modifier X,

$[Gn \ Y \ V \ X]^{u,c} = 1$ iff for all situations s' and individuals a such that $s' \ R \ s_c$, there is a perceptual occurrence d, $\langle [Y], d \rangle \in [V]^{u,c'}$ & $d \in [X]^{u,c'}$, where c' is like c, except $s_c = s'$ and $a_c =$ the agent in s' .

Generic *one* involves the same form of logophoricity as verbal taste predicates, and thus the same sort of condition on contexts should apply to generic-*one* sentences. On my previous account (Moltmann 2006, 2010b), generic *one* ranges over individuals (in the relevant group) qua individuals the speaker identifies with or simulates. For present purposes, I will adopt that account. But in addition, I will assume that generic *one* goes along with a change in the context c, shifting the speaker in c to the individuals generic *one* ranges over:

(28) The semantics of generic *one*

$[one\ VP]^{u,c} = 1$ iff for all a' , a' $[qua\ a_c\ I\ a'] \in [VP]^{u,c'}$, where c' is like c except that $a_c = a'$.

Here I is the relation of identification or simulation (Moltmann 2006, 2010b).

Covariation of generic *one* and the experiencer of an impersonal perception predicate is made possible through the presence of a single generic operator in the sentence involving a shift of the context c to contexts c' where the agents of the contexts c' are the individuals the generic operator ranges over. This is indicated for conditionals below (using a simplified semantics):

(29) For contexts u and c , a definite NP Y , an impersonal perception verb V , and a modifier X ,

$[If\ one\ VP,\ then\ Y\ V\ X]^{u,c} = 1$ iff: for all a' , if a' $qua\ a_c\ I\ a' \in [VP]^{u,c'}$, then $\exists d (<[NP], d> \in [V]^{u,c'} \ \& \ d \in [X]^{u,c'})$, where c' is like c except that $a_c = a'$.

The same analyses apply to impersonal perception verbs of other modes. The sentences below will be about visual, auditory; olfactory; and tactile occurrences with the same first personal orientation or logophoric status as the taste occurrences described by the verb *taste*:

- (30) a. When I saw the picture this morning it looked great.
 b. When I listened to it this morning, the piano sounded good.
 c. When I touched the fabric this morning, it felt good.

4. Taste objects and other perceptual objects

4.1. Taste nouns and nouns for other perceptual objects

The noun *taste* enables reference to a taste object, an entity that is independent of particular taste experiences and in particular does not depend on a particular experiencer. Nominal taste predicates in the constructions below share the same apparent generic reading of adjectival

taste predicates, as opposed to verbal predicates. That is, (29a) and (29b) only have the reading of (29c), not of (29d):

- (29) a. The coffee has a good taste.
 b. The taste of the coffee is good.
 c. The coffee is tasty.
 d. The coffee tastes good.

The application of relevant diagnostics, supports that, for example the applicability of adverbial modifiers as below:

- (30) a. In a china cup, tea tastes good.
 b. ?? In a china cup, the tea is tasty.
 c. ?? In a china cup, the taste of the tea is good.

The nominal constructions displays a reading on which *good* does not evaluate a particular tasting experience or better *taste occurrence*, but the taste of the coffee as something objectual or public. This is obvious from the way epistemic predicates apply. The taste of coffee is an object of knowledge, recognition, and differentiation:

- (31) a. Mary knows the taste of coffee.
 b. Bill recognizes the taste of cigarettes.
 c. Bill cannot distinguish the taste of coffee from the taste of chocolate.

There are likewise nouns for objects of other perceptual modes, such as looks, sounds, smells. They similarly provide objects of knowledge:

- (32) John knows the look / sound / smell of cats.

Apart from the semantics of nouns for perceptual objects and of impersonal perception reports, looks as entities have been motivated for purely philosophical reasons as well, namely for perceptual justification. Entities that are looks, McGrath (2017, 2018) has argued, act as the reasons for perceptual beliefs

There are actually two uses of nouns for tastes and other perceptual objects that need to be distinguished: a relational use and a nonrelational use. The relational use is restricted to reference to taste objects, as in (33a), whereas the non-relational use serves for reference to taste occurrences and kinds of them, as in (33b, c):⁵

- (33) a. I know the taste of coffee.
 b. I don't know this taste.
 c. I have never experienced this taste.

Only the construction *the taste of* applies to an entity mapping it to its 'objective' taste object that is associated with it.

For a given entity there may not be single perceptual object for a given perceptual mode, but rather a distinction may have to be made between viewpoint-relative looks and what I will call 'overall looks' ('looks in the round') (McGrath 2021). The relational noun *look* can be used for both, as in (34a) and (34b) respectively:

- (34) a. The statue has different looks, depending on the light and where one stands.
 b. I like the look of the statue.

With nominal taste predicates, it depends on the nature of the property expressed by the predicative complement whether the predicate itself gives rise to faultless agreement: evaluative predicates like *good* give rise to faultless agreement, as is possible in (35); predicates like *bitter* as in (36) don't, an issue I will come back to in Section 6.

- (35) a. Coffee has a good taste.
 b. The taste of coffee is good.
 (36) a. Coffee has a bitter taste.
 b. The taste of the coffee is bitter.

⁵ A similar distinction holds for the noun *color* (Moltmann 2013). (ia) has a reading involving reference to kinds of color occurrences, which is unavailable in (ib):

- (i) a. I have never seen this color.
 b. ? I have never seen the color of this car.

In (ib) *color of* is used relationally, referring to the color that pertains to a particular object.

In this paper, I will not give a full ontological account of taste objects and other perceptual objects. Rather it will have to suffice to characterize them in terms of some of their linguistically reflected properties.⁶ First of all, tastes are ontologically dependent on an entity, and thus they can thus not be conceived as properties. But tastes might be conceived as particularized properties, more precisely, particularized response-dependent properties. The entities on which a taste depends may inherit properties from the taste. Coffee is bitter because its taste is bitter, for example. But this does not hold for all properties. The taste of the wine may be unusual while the wine is not unusual. Objective tastes are to be distinguished from tastes that pertain to particular taste experiences, that is, ‘taste occurrences’. A taste object might be construed as a kind of taste occurrence, that is a kind whose instances are particular taste occurrences. However, taste objects do not appear to require actual instances, an intuition that is even clearer with related entities such as looks, as we will see.

4.2. The semantics of nominal and adjectival taste predicates

Tastes as entities and the distinction between taste occurrences and taste objects allow for a straightforward semantics of verbal and nominal taste predicates. Verbs like *taste* take particular taste occurrences as arguments, whereas the relational noun *taste (of)* takes taste objects as arguments. Thus the logical form of (37a) will be as in (37b), where the relational noun *taste* is taken to denote a function from entities to taste objects:

- (37) a. The taste of the coffee is good.
 b. $\text{good}(\text{taste}(\text{the coffee}))$

The individual-level status of taste adjective such as *tasty* can now be attributed to the implicit presence of taste objects, along the lines of the following equivalence:

- (38) $\text{tasty}(\text{the coffee}) \text{ iff } \text{good}(\text{taste}(\text{the coffee}))$

⁶ In fact, a semanticist should not have to decide how tastes are to be conceived ultimately, this rather is a matter for the philosopher of mind or metaphysician to decide. See the discussion of the distinction between foundational and naïve or descriptive metaphysics (which comprises natural language ontology) in Fine (2017) and Moltmann (2019).

This carries over to other perceptual relational nouns (*smell, sound, feel*) and perceptual adjectives.

The distinction between taste occurrences and taste objects generalizes to other modes of perception, though with different extents to which the objects are experience-dependent. With sounds, the distinction between experience-dependence and object-dependence is particularly intuitive. One may hear a particular sound and one may hear / know / recognize the sound of a particular flute. Verbal taste predicates display an experience-dependent reading, relational uses of nouns an object-dependent reading:

- (39) a. This flute sounds unusual.
 b. This flute has an unusual sound.
 c. The sound of the flute is nice.

The sound of a flute clearly is independent of a particular experience. It is less obvious that sounds are dependent on the object that produces them. Intuitively, the very same sound could have been produced by a different flute. Moreover, objects on which sounds depend do not generally inherit properties from the sounds. Thus, evaluative predicates when applied to musical instruments generally evaluate their physical shape, not their sounds. *Deep* cannot be applied to a contrabass even if the sound of it is deep, and *deep* applies to voices, not to the people that make the sounds.

Both predicates give rise to faultless disagreement with evaluative adjectives (See Section 9):

- (40) a. This flute sounds nice.
 b. This flute has a nice sound.
 c. The sound of the flute is nice.

Smells display the very same pattern, allowing for verbal and nominal predicates, as in (41), and displaying faultless disagreement with evaluative predicates, as in (42) (Section 6):

- (41) a. The perfume smells fruity.
 b. The perfume has a fruity smell.
 (42) a. The perfume smells nice.
 b. The perfume has a nice smell.

Properties of smells are inherited by entities only if the entities are of the very same nature (perfumes). Whereas properties of looks (properties of shape, size) are inherited from the entities that have the looks, properties of sounds, smells, tastes are not inherited from the entities that have them.

4.3. The ontology of perceptual objects

What is the ontological status of perceptual objects? Do they depend on experiences or are they mind-independent? McGrath (2017, 2021), who argued that looks play a role both for perceptual justification and the semantics of looks reports, argues against subjectivist and dispositionalist accounts of looks. First of all, looks do not require experiences by agents; they are ‘public’ entities. This holds both for both viewpoint-relative looks and overall looks.⁷ Linguistically, this appears reflected in the acceptability of the sentences below:

- (43) a. The statue would look the same even if no one had looked at it.
 b. The statue would have the same looks from the different angles even if no one had looked at it.

McGrath also argues against dispositionalist accounts of looks for ontological reasons: we do not ‘see’ or ‘recognize’ dispositions when we see or recognize a look. Ontologically, McGrath (2018) proposes to identify sets of sensible properties. An alternative that one might pursue is to take them to be kinds of (collections of) response-dependent tropes. Both views, though, still have to elaborate the distinction between view-point-relative and overall looks.⁸

To what extent can the arguments for experience-independence be generalized to perceptual objects of other modes? The contrasts below indicate they apply also to taste objects, as opposed to taste occurrences, at least with non-evaluative predicates:

⁷ McGrath (2018) distinguishes those from ‘subjective looks’, which would fall under perceptual occurrences in the present sense.

⁸ McGrath (2021) proposes that view-point-relative looks: be conceived as properties of presenting light of a certain character to the viewpoint, where looks on the round (overall looks) are what it is about an object that grounds the possibilities of its viewpoint-relative looks. This account obviously does not carry over to perceptual objects of other perceptual modes.

- (44) a. ? If one can no longer drink coffee, coffee can no longer taste bitter.
 b. If one can no longer drink coffee, coffee would still have a bitter taste.
- (45) a. ? If one can no longer drink coffee, coffee can no longer taste good.
 b. (?) If one can no longer drink coffee, coffee would still have a good taste.

The arguments do not carry over to all perceptual objects, though, in particular not those that can hardly be separated from the experience itself, such as feelings (as in *the massage feels great*). Feelings come with verbal predicates describing occurrences as well as nominal predicates describing feelings as objectual, ‘public’ entities. The latter, again, are able to act as objects of knowledge:

- (46) a. I don’t know what it feels like to be praised by everyone.
 b. I know the pleasure of good company.

That ‘feelings’ can hardly be dissociated from the experiences appears to be reflected linguistically, namely in the choice of the light verb with the nominal construction. Whereas tastes, looks, smells, and sounds are selected by the light verb *have*, feelings are selected by the light verb *give*:

- (47) a. This thing has / ?? gives a nice taste / look / smell / sound.
 b. The massage gives / ??? has a strange feeling.

Thus, at least some perceptual objects are individuated on the basis of experiences themselves.

5. Implicit agent-centered situations as objects of perception

Not only individuals or kinds of them may serve as referents of the subject of impersonal perceptual reports. The very same types of impersonal perception reports allow for what I will call *agent-centered situations* as the objects of perception. These are perceptual reports with the pronoun *it* as apparent expletive or dummy subject:⁹

⁹ Not all perception verbs that can occur in impersonal perception reports allow for agent-centered situations. German *wirken* ‘appear’, for example, cannot:

- (48) a. It is nice / hot / dark here.
 b. It smells nice here.
- (49) a. It looks like it is going to rain.
 b. It sounds like there will be a tempest.
 c. It smells like there is a fire nearby.
 d. It felt as if it was going to rain.

In (48a, b), *here* obviously gives the speaker's location. Other location modifiers are possible only if they specify the location of the speaker (or described attitude bearer) at another time as in (50a, b) and (51) or if the sentence has a generic reading, as in (52):¹⁰

- (50) a. It was nice in Germany.
 b. It will be interesting in Beijing.
- (51) There it looked like it was going to rain.
- (52) It is pleasant in Paris in spring.

With agent-centered situations, the copula *be* can take the place of the perception verb:

- (53) It was as if the sky had quietly kissed the earth ... (Eichendorff)

The agent-centered situations appear to have the very same 'logophoric' status as the perceptual occurrences of impersonal perception verbs. In contexts embedded under attitude verbs with a different agent, the situation will be centered on the other agent, as in (54a); but such a shift is not available without attitude verb, as in (54b):

- (54) a. John was happy that it was so pleasant in Germany (described-agent-oriented)
 b. John met me while it was still so pleasant in Berlin. (speaker-oriented)

-
- (i) a. Hans wirkt muede.
 'Hans appears tired.'
 b. Hans wirkt, als haette er nicht geschlafen.
 'John appears as if he had not slept.'
 c. * Es wirkt, als wuerde es regnen.
 'It appears as if it was going to rain.'

¹⁰ Sentences reporting weather (*it is raining*) belong to the same syntactic class; though they are less directly related to perception.

Agent-centered situations may also figure in generic-*one* sentences. Below the *when*-clauses restrict the agent-centered situations the implicit generic quantifier ranges over and that are also the object evaluation for the main clause:

- (55) a. It is unbearable when one has just lost a parent.
 b. It is like that when one is completely unprepared.

The agent-centered situations as the entities that impersonal perception reports are about relate to the shiftable context *c*, just like the perceptual occurrences described by impersonal perception verbs. For the semantics of impersonal perception reports with agent-centered situations, I will assume, as is plausible, that *it* in subject position stands for the relevant agent-centered situation. Then the semantics in a first approximation will be as follows:

(56) Truth conditions for impersonal perception reports with agent-centered situations

For an impersonal perception verb *V*, a modifier *X*, and contexts *u* and *c*,

$[It V X]^{u,c} = 1$ iff $\exists d(\langle [it]^{u,c}, d \rangle \in [V]^{u,c} \ \& \ d \in [X]^{u,c})$, where $[it]^{u,c}$ is a situation centered on a_c

There are two further observations to be made about impersonal perception reports with agent-centered situations.

First, there are cases in which the situation an (independent) impersonal perception sentence is about is in fact not the speaker-centered situation, but a contextually relevant one that one the speaker projects herself onto. These are examples:

- (57) a. It looks like the TV presenter is distracted.
 b. It sounds like you are exhausted.
 c. There it looks like no one had cleaned up.

Putting oneself in another situation (simulating being in the center of another situation) is an option that is similarly available with generic *one* and impersonal verbal taste reports, when a speaker may project herself onto another agent (*This tastes good* when speaking to a baby).

Second, with verbs like *seem* and *look* the agent-centered situations may also be epistemic situations, constituted by the evidence that presents itself in the context:

(58) a. It seems as if there is no solution to the problem.

b. It looks as if John is innocent.

6. Faultless disagreement with impersonal perception reports

Sentences expressing judgments of personal taste are at the center of a recent philosophical debate about faultless disagreement, the possibility for two agents maintaining (59a) and (59b) respectively being both right:

(59) a. Olives are tasty.

b. Olives are not tasty.

Given my previous views, faultless disagreement is due to the sentence expressing first-person-based genericity, involving simulation (Moltmann 2010, 2012), as below for (59a):

(60) $\lambda x[\text{Gn } y \text{ taste good to}(\text{olives, } y \text{ qua someone } x \text{ simulates})]$

This is still a relativist account since the property in (60) needs to be self-applied by anyone accepting the content of the sentences. However, unlike standard relativist accounts, it is first-person genericity that is crucial for explaining faultless disagreement. What matters for agreement or disagreement about taste judgments is whether agents can project themselves onto (or simulate) the same range of people on the basis of their first-person experience (or simulated experience). Two agents disagree about the taste judgments due to their ability or inability to attribute the taste judgment to anyone in the group on the basis of such identification.

Assuming first-person genericity to be the grounds for faultless disagreement, the present semantics of impersonal perception reports makes certain predictions as to when it will arise. First of all, the genericity of taste sentences with adjectival or nominal predicates is due to a taste object, not first person-based genericity. This means that with non-evaluative predicates such as *bitter*, *sweet*, *unusual* no faultless disagreement should arise, which appears to be correct:

- (61) a. The taste of coffee is bitter.
 b. This coffee is bitter.

However, a taste object may itself be subject of first-person based genericity, which arguably is part of the lexical meaning of evaluative predicates such as *delicious* or *mediocre*. With evaluative predicates, faultless disagreement clearly does arise:

- (62) a. The taste of coffee is delicious.
 b. Coffee is delicious.

A different prediction is made for verbal taste predicates. The genericity of verbal taste predicates is first-person-based genericity (even if the present proposal gives a more complex semantics of generic *one*, explicitly involving simulation). Thus verbal taste predicates should always give rise to faultless disagreement, which seems to accord with intuitions:

- (63) a. This drink tastes bitter.
 b. The cake tastes unusual.

The same contrast appears to hold for other perceptual predicates:

- (64) a. The perfume smells fruity.
 b. The smell of the perfume is fruity.

In contrast to (64a), (64b) does not seem to give rise to faultless disagreement.

7. Conclusion

This paper has argued for a novel semantics of impersonal perceptual reports based on an ontology of perceptual occurrences and perceptual objects. Perceptual occurrences display the same sort of ‘logophoric’ first-person orientation as generic *one*, as do agent-centered situations as the objects of perception in impersonal perception reports with dummy subjects. ‘Objective’ perceptual objects are the source of genericity of perceptual reports with nominal or adjectival predicates, which is thus a distinct form of genericity from the first person-based genericity available for perceptual reports with verbal predicates.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank John Collins, Matthew McGrath, and Dan Zeman for comments on a previous version of this paper. For very stimulating discussions, I would also like to thank the audience of an online presentation of the material of this paper at the University of Oslo in August 2021 (project S. Zobel ‘Impersonal Pronouns in Norwegian, Swedish, and German’).

References

- Bledin, J. / S. Srinivas (to appear): ‘Descriptive *As Ifs*’. *Linguistics and Philosophy*.
- Chierchia, G. (1995): ‘Individual Level Predicates as Inherent Generics’. In *The Generic Book*, ed. Gregory Carlson and Jeffry Pelletier, 176–223. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Collins, J. (2013): ‘The Syntax of Taste’. *Philosophical Perspectives* 27, 51-103
- Dinges, A. / J. Zakkou (2020): ‘Taste, traits and tendencies’. *Philosophical Studies* 178, 1183-1206.
- Fine, K. (2017): ‘Naïve Metaphysics’. *Philosophical Issues* 27, edited by J. Schaffer.
- Lasersohn, P. (2005), ‘Context dependence, disagreement, and predicates of personal taste’. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 28, 643–86.
- MacFarlane, J. (2014): *Assessment Relativity. Relative Truth and Its Applications*. Oxford UP, Oxford.
- McGrath, M. (2017): ‘Knowing What Things Look Like’. *Philosophical Review* 126, 1-41
- (2018): ‘Looks and perceptual justification’. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 96, 110-133
- (2021): ‘The metaphysics of looks’. Ms Rutgers University.
- Moltmann, F. (2006): ‘Generic *one*, arbitrary PRO, and the first person’. *Natural Language Semantics* 14, 257-281.
- (2010a): ‘Generalizing detached self-reference and the semantics of generic ‘one’’. *Mind and Language* 25, 440-473.
- (2010b): ‘Relative truth and the first person’. *Philosophical Studies* 150, 187–220.
- (2012): ‘Two kinds of first-person-oriented content’. *Synthese* 184, 157-177.
- (2019): ‘Natural Language and its Ontology’. In A. Goldman / B. McLaughlin (eds): *Metaphysics and Cognitive Science*, Oxford UP, 206-232.

- Pearson, H. (2021): 'Individual and stage-level predicates of personal taste'. To appear in J. Wyatt, J. Zakkou and D. Zeman (eds.): *Perspectives on Taste*. Routledge.
- Snyder, Eric. (2013): 'Binding, genericity, and predicates of personal taste'. *Inquiry* 56:2-3, 278-306.
- Stephenson, T. (2007), 'Judge dependence, epistemic modals, and predicates of personal taste'. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 30: 487–525.