

## ALETHIC RELATIVISM AND FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

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### **Introduction:**

Dora believes that liquorice is tasty. Norma, on the other hand, cannot stand liquorice and believes it to be the foulest tasting substance on the planet. To her, it is amply clear that it is false that liquorice is tasty. Dora and Norma then seem to be in disagreement with each other on the matter of the taste of liquorice. Understanding disagreement in terms of taking differing (doxastic/alethic) attitudes towards the same truth evaluable content, we may say that Dora and Norma take disparate attitudes towards the same content as expressed by (1):

(1) Liquorice is tasty.

Yet, it is not clear if either Dora or Norma can be faulted for taking the attitudes they take. As one may say, it is, after all, a matter of taste. It seems what we have here is the case of a *faultless disagreement* (FD, henceforth).

That there can be FDs seems quite intuitive. But, how can that be? How can we have disputes where no one is at fault? The ready explanation for faultlessness in the domain of taste seems to be that when it comes to taste there are no objective standards. Instead, different people can have different standards of taste and thus even if they disagree about the taste of something they are not to be faulted, as long as they are applying their standards correctly. In other words, the occurrence of FDs in a domain seems to demand a relativistic conception of the domain. Yet, it is not clear how to formulate a conception of relativism such that it can do justice to the intuition that there can be FDs.

Kölbel (2003) has argued that relativism, if it is to capture our intuition that there can be FDs, is best characterized as relativism about truth, as *Alethic Relativism* (AR henceforth). The complaint against alternate formulations of relativism is that they invariably make the disagreement disappear by relativizing the normative judgment or claim in such manner that the disputing agents can no more be seen to be holding disparate attitudes towards the *same* truth evaluable content. AR, according to Kölbel, solves the problem since it allows for the same completely truth evaluable content to be true according to one perspective/set of standards and false according to others. However, Boghossian (2011), building on an earlier argument by Richard (2008), has argued that AR fails to characterize any disagreements as faultless.

Attempts to recover the faultlessness, according to Boghossian, are successful only at the expense of the disagreement.<sup>1</sup>

Boghossian's case against AR boils down to saying that if AR is correct no agent can rationally see a dispute as both faultless and as a genuine disagreement. His argument rests on thinking from the immersed perspective, from a perspective where a normative judgment is warranted. We shall argue that it is completely possible to think about normative disputes from a perspective wherein no normative judgment is made or warranted. We shall argue that an agent taking such a perspective can very well see a normative dispute as a genuine case of an FD even if AR is correct.

### 1. Alethic Relativism and Faultless Disagreement

Let us take a more detailed look at how AR is motivated by the means of an FD. Kölbel characterizes an FD in the following way: A faultless disagreement 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 or judges that not-*p*
- (b) Neither *A* nor *B* has made a mistake (is at fault). (Kölbel 2003, p 53-54)

Dora and Norma do seem to have an FD in this sense. They seem to disagree about whether the proposition that liquorice is tasty is true or false but it also does not seem like we can fault the judgment of either since they are correct according to their tastes.

While, *prima facie*, it seems obvious that there can be FDs, in the domain of taste, for example, quite contrarily it also appears that one can argue against the possibility of any FDs. Here is how Kölbel presents the argument informally:

Consider an arbitrary disagreement between *A*, who believes *p*, and *B*, who believes not-*p*. Suppose that *p*. Then what *B* believes is not true. Now suppose that not-*p*. Then *A* believes something not true. Thus, in either case, one of the disputants believes something not true. But this means that in either case, one of the disputants commits a mistake. Thus the disagreement is not faultless. Since *A*, *B* and *p* were chosen arbitrarily, it follows that no disagreement is faultless. (Kölbel 2003, p 55)

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Richard's argument was only intended to show that FDs should not be thought of in terms of truth. Boghossian, on the other hand, is looking to use Richard's argument to build a case against the notion of AR itself.

This argument requires taking the notion of faultlessness in alethic terms, that is it assumes that being at no fault epistemically is not enough for an FD. If someone believes something false they are at fault. Kölbel sums it up as:

(T) It is a mistake to believe a proposition that is not true (Kölbel 2003, p 56)

This assumption may seem too strong to some. But Kölbel thinks that FDs exist even if we take such a strong alethic notion of faultlessness. All the argument shows is that given certain background assumptions the notion of FDs seems to be impossible. Perfect sense of FDs may be made if some of those assumptions are challenged. The specific assumption in question is that the truth or falsity of a statement is objective. As such, Kölbel's specific relativist suggestion amounts to saying that we seriously consider two things.

1. That in cases of FDs we have cases of people bringing in different perspectives (or standards: of taste in our example), where there is no fact of the matter about which perspective is the objectively correct one.
2. That statements like (1) are not objectively true (or false), but true (or false) only relative to some given perspective.

We need to understand the second suggestion carefully. The suggestion is not that sentences like (1) are to be understood to be referring to the perspective of the subject; that their contents otherwise are in some sense incomplete just like that of (2).

(2) It is raining

Whether (2) is true or not, or expresses a true proposition or not, depends upon whether it is raining or not at some contextually salient location, perhaps the location of one of the conversational partners. But, presumably, that is so since (2) does not even make a truth evaluable statement without reference to the location of the speaker. In other words, the content of (2) is in that sense incomplete, it makes a complete truth evaluable assertion only when the location of utterances is either specified or implicitly understood due to the context. Thus, for (2) the truth evaluable content that is actually in question is not (2) but (2'), presuming the speaker is in New York at the time of utterance.

(2)It is raining in New York.

Similarly, one could say that (1) is really to be understood as (1') where *i* is an indexical that takes as its value some contextually salient perspective or individual.

(1) Liquorice is tasty according to *i*.

This relativizes the content of the statement to some perspective or subjective standard (Dora's or Norma's, for example). That is, Dora's judgment that (1) is true is really the judgment that liquorice is tasty from Dora's perspective is true since when Dora uses (1) *i* refers to Dora's standards. Similarly, when Norma uses (1) *i* refers to Norma or her standards of taste and hence when she judges (1) to be false she is judging that liquorice is tasty from Norma's standards.

This is what the indexical relativists such as Dreier (1990) have in mind<sup>2</sup> but not Kölbel. Kölbel notes that with indexical relativism we do not get an FD between Dora and Norma since the propositions they are judging to be true or false are very much distinct. Instead, what Kölbel is suggesting is to think that sentences like (1) have truth evaluable contents *as is*. However, their truth is relative to the perspective or standards of evaluation of the speaker. In other words, it is not the content of these sentences which is relative to the perspective of assessment but the truth of their contents is. So, Dora and Norma mean the same thing by (1) but when Dora says it she makes a false assertion (or that, when she utters its negation she makes a true one) according to her standards, but when Norma utters it she makes a true assertion according to her standards.

Once we consider the AR view we can now make perfect sense of faultless disagreements as long as faultlessness is not understood in terms of truth *simpliciter a la (T)* but in terms of relative truth *a la (T\*)*:

(T\*) It is a mistake to believe a proposition that is not true as evaluated from one's own perspective.

Now with AR in place and FDs understood in terms of (T\*) instead of (T) neither of Dora or Norma can be said to be at fault or making a mistake. This is so since even though Dora and Norma hold (1) to be true and false, respectively, contrary to the each other, (1) really is true relative to Dora's perspective and false relative to Norma's perspective.

So, it seems that AR can account for their being an FD between Dora and Norma as long as being at fault is understood in terms of relative truth. But, some like

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<sup>2</sup> This is of course a considerable simplification of the internal relativist view. See (Dreier 1990) for more details.

Richard (2008) and Boghossian (2011) believe that even given AR and (T\*) we still do not have an FD between Dora and Norma.

## 2. The Argument from Perspectival Immersion

Richard has argued that understood in terms of relative truth disagreements cannot be faultless: [W]hen one is willing to ascribe truth or falsity to a particular claim  $p$ , one treats  $p$  and the claim that  $p$  is true as equivalent: *within* a perspective, truth is ‘disquotational’. 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's true that Beaufort is better than Tome. And of course if you think Tome is better than Beaufort and not vice versa I can also (validly) say that you think that it's not the case that Beaufort is better than Tome. So I can (validly) say that it's true that Beaufort is better than Tome though you think Beaufort isn't better than Tome. From which it surely follows that you're mistaken—after all, if you have a false belief, you are mistaken about something. This line of reasoning is sound 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’. Faultless disagreement is possible—but such disagreement is not one to be evaluated in terms of truth. (Richard 2008, 132) Boghossian presents the argument, which he calls *the argument from (perspectival) immersion*, in the following semi-formal manner:

*The Argument from (Perspectival) Immersion:*

(3) The content ( $p$ ) is at best relatively true. (Alethic Relativism)

(4) If Dora judges validly that  $p$ , it will also be valid for Dora to judge that *It's true that  $p$* .

(Truth is Disquotational within a perspective)

(5) If Dora judges that *It's true that  $p$*  then Dora must, on pain of incoherence, judge that *It's false that  $not-p$* .

(6) If Dora judges that *It's false that  $not-p$* , then Dora must, on pain of incoherence, judge that anyone who judges  *$not-p$*  (e.g., Norma) is making a *mistake*.

Therefore,

(7) Dora must judge that Norma is making a mistake and so cannot regard the disagreement with Norma as faultless.

Therefore,

(8) The disagreement between Dora and Norma is not faultless. (Boghossian 2011, p 62)

The first premise, that is (3) as labelled here, just follows from the statement of Alethic Relativism. The premise (4) follows from the fact that the equivalence schema for truth, i.e. a sentence 'S' is true if and only if S, holds for truth and even if the truth is taken to be relative to perspectives it would hold within the perspective. The premise (5) follows from taking Dora to be of a sound rational mind thereby assuming that she will not take both the proposition that p and the proposition that not-p to be true. If she takes the first to be true then she, just like any rational agent, must take the second to be false. But, now if Dora takes it to be false that not-p then she should also take someone who believes or judges that not-p to be mistaken or be at fault, which is what (6) expresses. Thus, we seem to conclude that Dora (or, Norma, or anyone for that matter) cannot take another agent whom they disagree with to be faultless, even if the truth is relative in the domain to which the statement disagreed on belongs.

The important thing about the argument from immersion is the notion of immersion itself. Being immersed in a perspective amounts to the immersed subject holding steadfast to his/her normative principles and making normative judgments, and using *his/her* normative principles in making these normative judgments. If Dora is truly immersed and committed to her principles of taste then she would be committed not only to making the normative judgment that liquorice is tasty, but also that Norma is wrong in thinking that it is not, and most importantly that any standard of taste that suggests otherwise is flawed. This is what precludes Dora herself from using (T\*) and thereby judging Norma, whose evaluation of (1) is perfectly in accordance with her perspective, to not be making any mistake. In any case, the truth of a philosophical position like AR can not be dependent on whether actual agents subscribe to it.

Hence, the argument looks secure until (7). But, what justifies the move from (7) to the conclusion (8)? We can very well agree in that in the example of FD above that Dora and Norma being immersed take the disagreement to be faulty. But why

should we take that to imply that it is faulty? Boghossian (2011) thinks that the transition from the premise (7) to the conclusion can be supported based on the “plausible claim that if a disagreement were faultless it must be possible for a rational thinker to claim that it is.” But on what basis does Boghossian assume that if Dora and Norma cannot rationally claim their disagreement to be faultless then there is no other person who could rationally do so? Couldn't the reader rationally claim it to be so?

Boghossian's thought seems to be that the reader is also going to be a normative agent and must as such be part of the discourse and not a mere observer. As such the reader being a normative agent must, in the normative discourse Dora and Norma are engaged in, assume the position of either Dora or Norma. In other words, for any reader either it is going to be true that liquorice is tasty or it is going to be false that liquorice is tasty; the reader must him/herself be immersed one way or the other. In the first case, the reader would have to find Norma to be mistaken and in the later, the reader will have to find fault with Dora. Consequently, the understanding is, there is no rational thinker who can coherently claim the discourse to be faultless since every rational agent being a normative agent too will have to be a part of the normative discourse and pick either Dora or Norma's side, whereby he or she is bound to find the other side of the dispute as being at fault.

The argument goes through then if we accept that any rational agent trying to make sense of a normative dispute will himself/herself have to make normative judgments. But, is this a reasonable assumption? Granted, that in the case of Dora and Norma, or any similar normative disputes, we might find the standards of the taste of one correct and the other wrong. After all, for any agent either the agent likes the taste of liquorice or not. But, we also seem to be able to make perfect sense of the idea that neither Dora nor Norma are committing any mistake *as per their respective standards*. While one invariably has a normative perspective and invariably applies it in making normative judgments in evaluating disputes, one can also make purely rational (i.e. otherwise non-normative) judgments about whether the normative stances of the agents locked in a dispute are consistent with their perspectives.

It seems then that normative agents can refrain from making normative judgments and can make judgments *about* a normative discourse on purely logical grounds. One can keep from entering the normative debate oneself by dissociating

oneself from one's normative perspective and maintaining instead a purely rational normatively dissociated perspective which we shall call a *Dissociated Perspective* (or, DP in short). The question then is in evaluating whether a normative dispute such as between Dora and Norma is an FD or not should we consider the judgments we make from our normatively immersed perspective or from a DP. This is the issue we intend to address in the rest of the paper.

### **3. Faultlessness from a Dissociated Perspective:**

In this section, we want to argue for two things: one, that someone can take up a DP, and two, that from a DP the disagreement between Dora and Norma indeed comes out to be faultless. In the rest of the paper, we shall try to establish that from a DP a normative dispute can indeed be seen as a genuine case of an FD.

To begin with, we need to give brief characterizations of a DP and an immersed perspective. A DP is when a normative agent refrains from using his/her normative system. It is not that s/he uses some other but that s/he refrains from making normative judgments regarding the concerned normative modality completely. S/he still has the use of his/her logical principles (and the normative principles of other modalities) and s/he can use that to make logical judgments about what normative judgments would follow from some given set of normative principles. As a DP is achieved by refraining from one's normative principles but using one's logical ones, it is not an objective view from nowhere, but rather a curtailed view from somewhere. It is very important to note that this is not the same as a third-person perspective as one may very well make normative judgments from a third-person perspective (as Boghossian assumes one must). In other words, a third-person perspective does not necessitate taking a DP.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> One may go on about the characteristics of a DP: in that much there can be as many distinct DPs as distinct logical system people may subscribe to, though that by the view of quite a few may mean just one. However, even in being a curtailed view it allows for a much greater commensurability between distinct normative system in as much as the logics may be intercommensurable. Intercommensurability of logics need not be limited to same logic but as long as one's logic allows one to make systematic judgments about what follows on the basis of another logic using the former as metalanguage in the same way as classical logic does for paracomplete or paraconsistent logics, one may be able to use it to make logical judgments about the other normative system. However, I think for our current purposes the discussion of a DP in the main text above should suffice.

An immersed perspective as we see it then is characterized in contrast with a DP. It is just when one holds steadfast and committed to one's normative principle and is committed to making use of them when making normative judgments. Also, one cannot but fail to make a normative judgment following one's standards when a normative question arises. One is then committed to the correctness of one's normative system, and the wrongness of conflicting ones. Again this is not the same as taking a first-person perspective since it is completely plausible to take a third-person perspective and be committed to one's normative standards and be ready to employ them, among other things, to judge them as right and conflicting others as wrong.

Given these characterizations let us now consider again the purported example of an FD, the dispute between Dora and Norma about the taste of liquorice. Specifically, consider the way initially the example of an FD between Dora and Norma was introduced. To begin with, at least the dispute seemed to be faultless. The question to be asked now is what position did the reader take in assessing relativism's merits in explaining the example of FD. Did the reader take Dora's position or did the reader take Norma's position? The answer seems to be neither. The way the example was presented the reader was invited to take a position independent of the perspectives of either Dora or Norma. The reader took a Dissociated Perspective. In taking the DP, the reader keeps from evaluating the truth of the statement according to his standards and instead engages with the purely logical question of whether the statement would be true or not according to the standards of the subjects. In other words, the reader is not invited to and is not looking to, make a normative judgment about the taste of liquorice. S/he is invited to is to make a logical judgment instead. Since the reader is not making a normative judgment there is no question of the normative judgments of either Dora or Norma being at fault since they conflict with that of the reader's. Instead, the reader sees no fault from his/her perspective, which exemplifies a DP, since s/he disengages from his/her standards and can see that the judgments of Dora and Norma would logically follow from their respective standards or perspectives.

Using the notion of a DP one can object to the transition from (7) to (8) in the argument from immersion. Boghossian's rationale for the transition was that "if a disagreement was faultless it must be possible for a rational thinker to claim that it

is.” (Boghossian 2011, p 62). Now, it seems we are in a position to point to such a rational thinker: the reader.

One point here needs clarification. The counter-argument here need not rest on the fact that the reader's in judging evaluating the dispute between Dora and Norma exemplified a DP. Boghossian could deny that being the case. He may look to suggest an alternate explanation for why in the case in question here the reader might be able to entertain some relativistic intuitions.

But, one may very well, instead of taking our description of the reader's position as a factual description of matters, take it as a description of a possible way to approach the issue. That is, we could say that even if the reader does not take a DP in evaluating the dispute it is very much possible for the reader to take a DP. Then it can be said that if it a person in evaluating the dispute between Dora and Norma were to assume the reader's position to make sense of faultlessness in this case while adhering to AR the person could see the dispute as faultless by taking a DP.

From the considerations offered above, one can conclude that Boghossian's move from (7) to (8) in the argument form immersion can be successfully blocked, and hence there is for AR no issue with faultlessness in the discourse. The key to blocking this move is, of course, to deny the presumed necessity of immersion.

#### **4. Losing Disagreement?**

It would seem then Boghossian's argument has been successfully blocked. But, Boghossian has suggested that the person looking from a dissociated perspective should not consider the disagreement between Dora and Norma as a *genuine* disagreement.<sup>4</sup>

To see how Boghossian's suggestion could be worked out let us see how he builds the case the other time he makes essentially the same point. Boghossian considers a possible response to his argument where it is suggested that Dora and Norma could, in fact, see the dispute between themselves as faultless. Boghossian's argument from perspectival immersion may be seen as relying on Dora herself not subscribing to AR and (T\*) but rather to something like (T). It is for that reason that Dora takes Norma to be mistaken. But what if Dora and Norma take the idea of

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<sup>4</sup> Boghossian made this suggestion in response to a question regarding the possibility of a DP raised by one of the authors of this paper in a question answer session with Boghossian where the author was part of the audience.

relative truth seriously and therefore understand making a mistake in terms of (T\*) and not (T)?<sup>5</sup> Would not in that case Dora and Norma be able to see not just their own but also the other's stance on the taste of liquorice as not mistaken and therefore the disagreement between them as faultless? It appears that Dora and Norma would be able to make sense of the fact that they can judge that *not-p*, recognize that the other judges that *p*, take their judgment to be "true" and the other's to be "false," recognizing all the while that when they say that their judgment is true and the other's false, they effectively mean "true and false relative to my perspective." That leaves Dora and Norma free to judge that the other's judgment is not a *mistake* since the fundamental norms governing the ascription of mistake will now be (T\*) and not (T).<sup>6</sup>

Boghossian rejects this because here we lose the sense of there being a *genuine* disagreement. He worries that if Dora and Norma know that there are different standards of truth about taste that they are both judging according to their standards then one can not consider the other to be disagreeing with them. As Boghossian puts it: How is it possible to regard this as a *genuine* disagreement?

I know that Norma has different standards than mine. I regard her standards as just as correct as mine. I know that her judgment is true relative to her standards. And I also affirm that these sorts of judgment have no other kind of truth-value, no absolute truth-values.

It's simply obvious, it seems to me, that if I have said all this, I cannot regard this as a real disagreement, no more than I can regard the guy who says "It is morning" in the morning to be disagreeing with the guy who says "It is afternoon" in the afternoon. (Boghossian 2011, p 66)

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<sup>5</sup> Boghossian (2011) in fact has slightly different sets of norms about belief. But as far as I can see they simply boil down to (T) and (T\*) above as long as (T) and (T\*). Just replacing the

<sup>6</sup> The last two sentences are mere rephrases of the following passage from (Boghossian 2011, p 65-66) slightly changed to suit the case here:

For I would be able to make sense of the fact that I can judge that *p*, recognize that someone else judges that *not-p*, take my own judgment to be "true" and the other person's judgment that *not-p* to be "false," recognizing all the while that when I say that my own judgment is true and his false, I effectively mean "true and false relative to my perspective." That leaves me free to judge that his judgment that *not-p* is not a *mistake*, since the fundamental norms governing my attitudes will now be Relative Belief and Assertion and not their absolutist counterparts.

Boghossian is here a bit too terse. Though, it seems quite intuitive it has not exactly been spelt out what is going wrong with disagreement here. But, let us try to see what systematic thought may underlie Boghossian's claim that here we do not get *real* or *genuine* disagreement. Wright (2006) understands the notion of a genuine disagreement as: *genuine disagreements involve genuinely incompatible attitudes being taken with respect to the same proposition.*<sup>7</sup> Kölbel's own characterization of a disagreement (*A* believes or judges that *p* and *B* believes or judges that not-*p*) is in line with this understanding of a genuine disagreement since it would seem that believing/judging it is true that *p* and believing/judging that it is false that *p* are genuinely incompatible. And how may we understand the notion of genuine incompatibility? It seems to us that two attitudes are genuinely incompatible if it is impossible for the same agent to rationally hold them at the same time towards the same propositional content.

Boghossian's suggestion seems to be that if Dora and Nora find no fault in the other's judgment because each of them knows that (1) can at best be relatively true and false and while it is true/false from their perspective it is the opposite from the other's perspective, then neither can be seen any more as simply holding the attitude towards (1) of judging it to be true/false. In their moment of relativistic insight, Dora and Norma cannot anymore make the judgment that (1) is true or false period, they can only make the judgment that (1) is true or false *according to their perspective*. In their moment of relativistic insight, the contents of the attitudes of Dora and Norma themselves get relativized. They are then indeed in the same position as what is envisioned by the indexical relativist, or the guys one of who says "It is morning" in the morning and the other guy who says "It is afternoon" in the afternoon (considering that such statements can be taken to have a hidden indexical for the time of utterance). And in the same manner, as the indexical relativist, the disagreement is lost.

However, what Boghossian has said about losing disagreement here requires the normative agents to accept AR. But, as we remarked earlier the truth or falsity of AR should not require that any normative agents believe in it. Dora and Norma may be perfect absolutists about truth. Furthermore, the issue under investigation in this

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<sup>7</sup> This sums up his intent as we understand it; it is not a direct quote.

section was whether the reader taking up a DP can see the dispute between Dora and Norma to be a case of an FD or not.

Can we say that the disagreement dissolves even from the reader's DP? A *prima facie* case corresponding to above can be made in terms of the reader who judges the dispute from a DP as well: when the reader judges Dora and Norma to be faultless the reader may not judge simply that (1) is true or false, but the reader must judge that it is true from Dora's perspective and false from Norma's perspective. But, these judgments are not genuinely incompatible. The same rational agent can perfectly well hold the judgment that it is morning in the morning and it is afternoon in the afternoon. Similarly, Dora, Norma, and the reader can all perfectly rationally hold both the judgments that (1) is true from Dora's perspective and that it is false from Norma's.<sup>8</sup>

The purported problem that Boghossian is alluding to is this: disagreement requires incompatible attitudes, but in judging faultlessness, the requisite relativistic understanding of the attitudes (understood in terms of AR) in question renders them compatible. The faultlessness of a dispute and its genuineness as a disagreement then cannot stand together in the eyes of any rational agent if AR is correct.

### 5. The Question of Attitudes

I think we have now been able to come to the point where we can see where Boghossian's case against AR is problematic. Whether we can take the dispute between Dora and Norma to be a case of genuine disagreement or not seems to depend ultimately on whether we can hold the relevant attitudes to be genuinely incompatible or not. Boghossian's suggestion, of course, is that we cannot. But, we think the problem here lies in conflating between two distinct kinds of attitudes.

We should not confuse the attitude of the judging [that p is true/false] from perspective N with the attitude of the judging [that p is true/false from perspective N].<sup>9</sup> In the first attitude, while the judgment is made based on norms that are only relative, the truth or falsity that is predicated to the proposition is not of relative truth

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<sup>8</sup> This was essentially Boghossian's response. See footnote 4 above.

<sup>9</sup> What is inside the square brackets here is supposed to be the content of the judgment. So, in attitude of judging [that p is true] from perspective N only has that p is true as content. The phrase "from perspective N" only shows the standards or perspective the judgment is made on the basis of. It is not indicating any part of the content of the judgment.

or falsity but absolute truth or falsity. In the second, the phrase “from perspective N” is itself part of the content of the judgment; the truth/falsity predicate is itself relative.

One thing is undisputed. When the reader in trying to entertain the AR position evaluates the dispute between Dora and Norma to see whether it is faultless or not the reader has attitudes of the latter kind. The reader judges that the propositional content of (1) is true according to Dora’s perspective and also judges that the same propositional content is false according to Norma’s perspective. These attitudes of judging are such that the truth or falsity predicate is relative. These are undoubtedly perfectly compatible with each other. But, are these the attitudes relevant to see whether the dispute between Dora and Norma is a case of an FD or not?

We need to answer three questions including the one above:

Q1: Whose attitudes are relevant for judging that the dispute between Dora and Norma is a case of an FD?

Q2: Are the attitudes of Dora and Norma of the first kind or the second kind (from the two kinds just pointed out above)?

Q3: If Dora’s and Norma’s are of the first kind then are they genuinely incompatible with each other?

The answers to these three questions will show whether Boghossian has a case against AR or not.

In seeing from the reader’s DP whether the dispute between Dora and Norma is a case of an FD or not if it were the attitudes of the reader then Boghossian would certainly be correct. The attitudes of the reader of judging that (1) is true from Dora’s perspective and judging that (1) is false from Norma’s perspective are perfectly compatible with each other. But, these are not the attitudes that we and the need to figure out the incompatibility between. The dispute is between Dora and Norma and we need to see whether the attitudes they are having are incompatible with each other or not. As such, in evaluating the dispute between Dora and Norma the reader must look at the attitudes of Dora and Norma to see if they are incompatible.

The question now is of whether Dora’s and Norma’s attitudes are of judging absolute truth and falsity or attitudes whose content is itself relativized in virtue of predicating relative truth or falsity. If we were talking about Dora and Norma themselves trying to see their dispute as an FD then they would have attitudes with relativized contents. To judge their dispute as faultless they would have to see that

they are each only judging (1) as true or false from their perspectives. In that case, Boghossian's case would be fine since we have already seen that the attitudes with relativized truth and falsity are completely compatible with each other. But, there is no need that Dora and Norma themselves must be able to see their dispute as an FD. That was the whole point in pointing to the reader evaluating the dispute from a DP. Until and unless Dora and Norma are not among the handful of people who also happen to be philosophical proponents of AR themselves they are not going to ascribe to (1) relative truth or falsity but absolute truth or falsity. The attitudes of Dora and Norma are therefore going to be of the kind where the content of the judgment is not relativized.

Thus, the proper way to understand Dora's and Norma's judgments about (1) is in the following way: Dora judges [that (1) is true] from Dora's perspective and Norma judges [that (1) is false] from Norma's perspective. The final question to ask now is 'are their attitudes compatible'. Dora's and Norma's attitudes are of predicating absolute truth and absolute falsity to the same propositional content. Normally, there would be no question about their incompatibility. However, we know that Dora makes her judgment based on her standards of taste and Norma makes her judgment based on her standards of taste. The judgments are made based on different standards; they are made from different perspectives. Nonetheless, their attitudes must be accepted as incompatible for the simple reason that normative agents, until and unless proponents of AR, in judging a proposition such as that expressed by (1) to be true or false can only judge it to be so from their normative perspectives and not from someone else's perspective. Furthermore, if one's perspective is not inconsistent then the agent can only rationally judge a proposition to be either true or false but not both. Thus, neither is it possible for a non-relativist agent who judges a proposition as true (from his/her perspective) to rationally judge the same proposition as false (from his/her perspective) nor is any other perspective available to the agent to judge the proposition false from that perspective.

Take Dora's case as an example. Dora judges (1) to be true. She does so from her perspective. From her perspective, only the truth of (1) follows not its falsity. It would be irrational for her to judge from her perspective that (1) is false. But, neither can she judge it to be false from Norma's perspective since that perspective is not available to her to make a judgment from, only her own is. As such, Dora cannot

rationally judge both [that (1) is true] from her perspective and judge [that (1) is false] from Norma's perspective. Same can be said for Norma or any other normative agent. Thus, no rational agent can judge [that (1) is true] from Dora's perspective and also judge [that (1) is false] from Norma's perspective. Thus, Dora's and Norma's attitudes are genuinely incompatible after all.

To sum up: for an agent who is not a proponent of AR judging whether liquorice is tasty or not is no different from judging whether the grass is green or not. All judgments are made on certain bases of judgment that one has internalized. Whether those bases are objectively valid or only a matter of one's perspective is not open to the non-relativist normative agent. Nor, is any other perspective available. This fact means that Dora's and Norma's attitudes are genuinely incompatible, which in turn implies that their dispute is a genuine disagreement. A person, such as a reader, who is investigating the dispute between Dora and Norma but is not looking to make any normative judgments but only logical ones, ie a person employing a DP, can see that the dispute is a genuine disagreement. Nonetheless, while such a person can see that no one can rationally have both the attitudes that Dora and Norma have, the person can also see that neither of Dora or Norma is really at fault. Dora and Norma can only make judgments from their perspectives which they both correctly do. Thus, the person employing a DP can see the dispute between Dora and Norma to be a genuine case of an FD.

Boghossian failed to accept this fact because he did not appreciate the availability of a DP. But, one can take up a DP and from a DP one can make sense of the fact that certain normative disputes may indeed be genuinely faultless and genuine disagreements.

## **6. Concluding Remarks:**

We are not proponents of AR. We firmly believe that AR is not the correct way of understanding the notion of truth, in normative domains or otherwise. But, philosophical theories can be revealing in their failure. However, for that, it is important that we first sincerely give philosophical theories their due consideration. AR is a substantive philosophical position which needs to be taken seriously. We feel it will be sustained or it will fall depending on what sense we can make of the notion of relative truth. Boghossian's rejection of AR is however based on no such considerations. Instead, it looks to do away with AR on the cheap by first identifying

AR as the claim that genuine FDs are possible and then arguing that even given AR genuine FDs are not possible. Hence, Boghossian feels justified in claiming that AR is “inherently unstable”. But, the inherent instability that Boghossian sees in AR is not a property of AR itself but an artefact of Boghossian’s failure to appreciate the possibility of evaluating normative disputes from a normatively dissociated perspective.

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