

Responses to commentaries on 'Flavour, Taste and Smell'
Louise Richardson

(I) Mohan Matthen, 'Is the Everyday Conception of the Senses Static?'

I think that, happily, there's a lot in common between our views, Mohan! I'll start by saying a bit about these commonalities—since these are also apparent in your forthcoming paper I'll use that to help me, too.

In that paper, you distinguish, Gibson-style, sensory modalities and perceptual modalities. One criterion, HMTTC, individuates the former and another criterion, PSC, individuates the latter and is intended to be the criterion applied by the folk. As you put it, 'it oversimplifies the matter to say simply that PSC is correct and HMTTC mistaken (or vice versa).'

Similarly, in my paper, I was keen, above all else, to underline the point that there is no very easy move from scientific data about how perceivings are brought about to the claim that we 'folk' have been miscategorising those perceivings. Any move from one to the other will go via some view of how we think of the senses, or what I called the everyday conception of the senses. And any such view will be in need of defence.

In your comments on my paper you allow that, in a way, the *data* about the psychology of flavour perception does not show that we perceive flavours by the activity of sniffing (or smelling). The data leaves untouched the belief that flavours are perceived by the activity of tasting. On the view you've defended, it's in terms of these activities that we ordinarily distinguish between the senses. Perhaps you might accept that this is a sort of non-naturalistic view of our everyday conception of the senses. That is, it's a view on which what we're trying to get at, with ECS, is something that is individuated just in terms of a surface feature. So, it seems that you accept that there is *a* conception of the senses of which a specific kind of non-naturalism is true, and that the data about flavour perception doesn't show that flavours are perceived in some way other than this non-naturalistic view says that they are.

Now onto the more 'corrective' aspect of your comments. Your most general point is that conceptions change. I think that one reason for wondering about the nature of ECS is (as Matt mentions in his commentary) a remarkable lack of change in our sensory judgements, up to now. I agree that that in itself doesn't mean that it's static in any interesting sense. It may just be, for instance, that the right circumstances for change have not yet arrived.

In a sense, I don't think that any plausible view of ECS, naturalist or non-naturalist, *has* to deny this, although there may conceivably be a kind of non-naturalism that would. However, *how* that change can come about and *what sort of change* it will be, will be determined, in part, by what view of ECS is true. One example. Suppose that Matt's view is true. In particular, suppose that our concepts of the senses are 'folk psychological' concepts, the rationale of which is understanding and predicting other people's behaviour. It's imaginable, I think,

that we might be led to believe that making the distinction in a different way will serve this interest of ours better. And thus our concepts might change. There's no reason to think that this isn't a change that science could have some role in effecting. Perhaps its role would be somewhat indirect, in this sort of case, as I take it it is on the picture you draw of how science might change our categorising ways by changing perceptual practice.

I hope that seems a reasonable thing to say. I think that my saying it does demonstrate that (as Fiona forcefully argues) I rather overstated my case, in the paper, in claiming that 'if non-naturalism is correct then science cannot overturn common-sense judgements that flavours are just tasted'. It might be able to do so, in interesting, indirect ways, even on non-naturalistic views, *and given certain other assumptions*. (See my response to Fiona.)

One question about your picture of how science can overturn sensory judgements, given your view of ECS about perceptual activities: it seems that what happens to the subjects you discuss is that they come, through participation in psychological protocols, to *change what they do*. So they now sniff when they perceive flavour (sometimes, anyway). Or, they look when perceiving speech. What's changed, then, is that which ECS categorises, on your view of ECS. So, it's not that ECS has been made to change its categorising ways, so much as that the perceivings categorised have changed, and thus are to be differently categorised. Is that right? If it is right, I'm not clear about the respect in which it's right to say that this 'puts pressure' on ECS. To use your colour analogy: if lots of the blue things were made yellow overnight, it's not clear that that would put pressure on our everyday conception of colour.

What makes room for interesting disagreement between us, I think, is that whilst you think that a particular non-naturalism about ECS as applied to perceptual activities is true, you think that there is something else that ECS categorises, of which a sort of naturalism is true. In discussing your dog you emphasise, I think, that merely perceiving, as a dog does, is not sufficient for knowing that one's perception is (say) olfactory, or otherwise. You go on to say that 'perception is not sufficient for me to know this', either. I think one thing you're drawing out here, is the feeling, that others reading this will probably share, that whilst whether a perceiving is brought about by sniffing is something that is accessible to us (and even, in a way, to a dog) whether or not that perceiving is or is not olfactory is another matter altogether. What determines whether *that* is the case is something not accessible to us. So it looks as if on your view, there is an aspect of thought and talk about the senses of which a particular form of non-naturalism is true, and an aspect of that thought and talk of which naturalism is true.

The point, here, *might* be that the term 'olfactory' is a scientific term. 'Olfactory', perhaps, belongs to the domain of individuating sensory systems, mechanisms or processes that underlie perception. Perhaps that's right. In which case, I ought to change the terminology I use in some parts of my paper. I ought to say that I'm interested in whether what's missing in the puzzle about the sweets is an

experience, or an aspect of experience, that belongs to the *sense of smell* and avoid the term 'olfactory'. But then, the puzzle doesn't go away.

Alternatively, the point might be that whilst perceptual activities are individuated by their surface features, perceptual experiences (to which the term 'olfactory' might be applied) are not. I think your view is that like your dog, we cannot tell to which modality a perceptual experience belongs and we await further word from science, to tell us how to do so. I find this sort of mixed view quite intriguing, and would like to think more about it. For now, I end by saying that it's not clear to me why we should think that perceptual experience has 'hidden depths', in the sense that that which determines the modality to which it belongs is something awaiting discovery (or perhaps, now, discovered). Or, more guardedly, it's not clear to me why we should think that in everyday thought and talk about the senses, we're categorising perceptual experiences in a way that presupposes that they have such depths.

(II) Fiona Macpherson, 'Can Science Tell us That We Smell?'

Thanks, Fiona, for your very thorough comments. I'll try, for now, to say just one thing about each of your three sections.

1: The 'modality question' and the 'experience question'.

There is a use of 'modality' on which the 'experience question' and the 'modality question' come apart, in the way you suggest, unless one adopts a certain criterion of individuation.

I suppose, though, that there's another use, which I had in mind. On that use, 'modality' means something like 'the capacity to have a certain sort of perception/perceptual experience.' Here, 'capacity' doesn't refer to a mechanism or process or sensory system that produces perceiving, but rather the 'potential' to see. Thus understood, I have the visual modality just in that I can see (undergo conscious seeings), and an auditory modality in that I can hear (undergo conscious hearings). I *think* that, at least sometimes, this is the understanding of 'modality' that some other philosophers have had in mind, when thinking about how to distinguish them. On this understanding, the dispute about how to distinguish the senses, or the modalities, is about whether (for instance) phenomenal character, sense organs, representational content or proximal stimulus is that which makes the difference between having one such capacity, and another. And thus understood, it's less clear that it makes sense to say 'the modality being used is hearing but the nature of the experience is visual', no matter what criterion of individuation one chooses.

I think this sense of 'modality' is captured particularly well when we talk about what modality an experience or a perceiving is 'in'. It is also consistent with sense of the noun 'modality' as the mode or form in which something exists or obtains, in this case, perceiving or perceptual experiences.

2: What non-naturalism entails

I tried to make clear that non-naturalism is a broad church. Matt's is one kind, I sketched a family of non-conventionalist varieties and there may be others too. The family of non-conventionalist non-naturalist views I sketch say: our concepts of the senses are not natural-kind concepts, in that that the surface features we use to pick out the senses are not merely a preliminary to a better understanding that we'll get from science.

I do allow, in the paper, that according to certain members of this family of views science *might* lead us to 're-label' some perceivings. (p328) For instance, given a certain understanding of what an odour is, and given the truth of a non-naturalism about ECS that says that 'proper objects' of a certain sort distinguish the senses, science might lead us to believe that some of what we thought were tastings have, after all, the surface feature definitive of 'being a smelling'. And as you suggest, given the truth of a non-naturalism about ECS that says that sense organs distinguish the senses, but also, importantly, *given a certain understanding of sense organs* (for instance, that in Keeley 2001, but c.f. Kenny 1963) science might tell us that some (maybe even lots!) of what we thought were tastings have the surface feature definitive of being a smelling.

So, it was misleading for me to say, without qualification, that 'if non-naturalism is correct, then science cannot overturn common-sense judgement that flavours are just tasted'. Because on certain kinds of non-naturalist view, but also, given certain answers to other philosophical questions (What is an odour? What is a sense-organ?) science can be said to, at least, contribute to overturning these judgements.

3: Dismissing non-naturalism?

One thing I'm very keen not to concede is that anything in the paper commits me to thinking that contemporary philosophers and scientists have, as you put it, 'the mentality of a juvenile who has been told that there are five senses at school and repeatedly parrots this back, unable to retain new beliefs gained from reading literature and science'. I hope, very much, that I can avoid being read in this way!

As you rightly say, Fiona, as well as thought and talk about the five familiar senses, there is a growing amount of thought and talk about other senses, too. I also agree with you that it's a tricky question how to accommodate it all, and I think it's a tricky question, in general, how to use things that people say as evidence about the nature of their concepts. (See, for instance, Kauppinen 2007) When I raised the possibility of 'paying lip service' to extra senses, I intended to indicate ways in which people's assenting to statements about actual, extra senses might be accommodated *without* threat to the sorts of non-naturalism they might appear to be a threat to.

What I present as the dispute over naturalism and non-naturalism is, in part, a dispute over how to understand the surprisingly long-lasting, cross-cultural

(though, as you say, nevertheless often questioned) way we have of talking and thinking about the senses, that takes there to be, in fact, just five. Given the quantity and easy availability of the data that seems to suggest otherwise, you might think that it's baffling that there's any talk about five senses, any more. I think, anyway, that there's something genuinely puzzling here. One response someone might have would not be especially associated either with naturalism, or non-naturalism. Someone might say, that is: to the extent that people think and talk about five senses, they are only doing it because that's what they're taught at school. Or, because it's an idea that we've inherited from Aristotle. (For clarity, perhaps it helps to say that both of these suggestions have been made to me in response to talks that were forerunners of the published paper and I don't think that either is true.) I think that to take the question of whether naturalism or non-naturalism is true seriously is to assume that there's more to be said than this.

None of this is yet to say anything about how to understand the thought and talk of those who are thinking and talking and writing a great deal about senses other than the familiar five. I suspect that at least some of it will be best accommodated by acknowledging that there is more than one thing one might mean by 'sense' or 'modality'—these terms, perhaps, are polysemous. Once this is acknowledged, there's no difficulty at all in accepting that *if* there are those who sometimes engage in five-senses talk, and also sometimes talk, think, and write about other (actual, human) senses, it in no way follows that they're merely, as you put it, parroting, and we *can* say that all this talking and thinking and writing is representative of beliefs of theirs. I hope to avoid the view that the relationship between scientific and 'folk' conceptions of the senses is merely one of being at cross-purposes. But, as I acknowledged in the paper (p339), and in the first part of my response to your commentary, there's good reason to think that this is at least sometimes true.

I realise that, in this response, I've spoken to only some aspects of your very interesting commentary. I hope it's enough to be going on with and hopefully we can also talk about the aspects I've thus far neglected in the blog comments.

(III) Matthew Nudds

Thanks, Matt, for your helpful commentary. I'll try to focus mainly on areas of potential disagreement, and hope that won't obscure how much we agree on! First, a note on how your setting up of the background to the paper relates to what I said, there.

One reason why I really like your description of the background is that it brings out the way in which the dispute between naturalism and non-naturalism about ECS is related to more general concerns about the relationship between scientific and folk psychology and more familiar discussions of reduction or elimination of the mental, or of certain mental items. However, I'm unsure whether the positive characterisation you offer of non-naturalism, as the view that ECS is a loose set of platitudes is consistent with the merely negative characterisation I tried to offer. Perhaps there are kinds of non-naturalism, as I characterise it, in the paper that

take ECS to be something more than a loose set of platitudes. I'd like to think about that some more.

You ask whether I think that 'evidence concerning flavour perception...gives us reason to think that our everyday conception cannot be refined into a rigorous theory of the senses'. I don't think this. But it's interesting that it points at a way of *arguing against naturalism, using the scientific data*. Or at least, if science finds nothing that corresponds to a rigorous theory then we might find ourselves having accept the following disjunction: 'either eliminativism is true or naturalism is false'. But as you rightly point out, in the case of flavour, it's not clear whether the science shows us that where taste is concerned, nothing corresponds to a rigorous theory, because there might well be room for a sensory system for the perception of flavour that corresponds to what we call taste.

Now onto the more critical component of your commentary, that is, the question of whether I'm successful in defending the claim that we don't have any reason to think that 3 is true rather than 2. You suggest that some of the platitudes that make up ECS are such that if they're false, perceivings of flavour might not, as we thought they did, ground knowledge of flavour. As you say, 'In some cases, at least, ignorance or error about the basis of a judgement, or about why the basis of a judgement provides a reason for the judgement, does undermine our knowledge.' Science tells us that we're wrong if we think that the basis of our judgements about flavour is, in a certain way, 'mouth-based' and in so doing, undermines knowledge of flavour. Furthermore, in this way, science undermines something that is not merely peripheral to ECS, but something "fundamental to our everyday conception of taste'. I hope I've understood that correctly.

First, I think there may be a different sense of 'peripheral' in play here, than that which I had in mind. I took something we believe about flavour perception to be peripheral to ECS if it didn't play a role (or perhaps I should say, a direct role) in bringing about judgements about which modality a perceiving belongs to. I think it's possible that giving up the platitude that flavour perception is wholly 'mouth based' may well be consistent with continuing to believe that it is a perceiving that belongs to the sense of smell. But it's consistent with this that some such 'peripheral' platitudes might be fundamental or central to thought about the senses in a deeper respect.

Second, and following on from this, I think it's a really interesting idea that acquaintance with the facts of flavour reception (as one might put it) is necessary if flavour perception is to give knowledge. In a way, that's a much more interesting way for science to impact upon ECS than telling us we've miscategorised perceivings.

Third, a question about the details of this suggestion. You mention that the set of platitudes we accept about the senses might not be consistent. That seems likely. And in fact, even if we do (prior to acquaintance with the scientific data) think that 'what happens' in flavour perception happens in the mouth there is also evidence, I think, that we've long known that the nose has got something to do

with it. We hold our noses to take bad-tasting medicine, for example, and complain about how bland everything tastes with a blocked nose. Would inconsistency in ECS undermine the status of flavour-perceivings as a source of knowledge? Or, would evidence that we've long had some idea of the causal involvement of something nose-related be enough to show that no revision to ECS is necessary for us to have knowledge of flavour?