Tasting Pineapple

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OBS. Denna uppsats är en vidareutveckling av (första delen) av en uppsats som seminariets deltagare redan har diskuterat en gång. Den innehåller dock så mycket nytt att en ny behandling är motiverad. Vill också gärna höra åsikter om vilka delar eller enskilda satser som kan tas bort.

This essay considers what it means to describe sensations. It will address reasons why philosophers and cognitive scientists often think there are unique and perhaps insurmountable obstacles to doing so. The essay will advance the suggestion that the relation between having sensations and describing sensations is not what the authors typically think. The problem has two roots: a schematic understanding of what it is to describe something – modelled on object and designation; and a deliberately narrow idea of what sensing something (tasting, seeing, etc., something) essentially is – namely, attending to an inner object or state. On this problematic view, the sensation itself is, at core, a raw feel, consisting of whatever is left inside our minds once all intersubjectively available aspects of sensing have been peeled away. To describe sensation is to pin it down and somehow, perhaps indirectly, to show it to others. For obvious reasons, the question arises how this is to be done at all.

The aim of this essay is not to deny the existence of sensations, nor the possibility of intersubjective talk about them. Talk of sensations is an obvious part of everyday interaction. The present task is not to affirm or deny this, but to get a clear idea of it. It will be suggested that in describing sensations, our attention is typically not directed inwards, to an elusive quale that we wish to grasp. Admittedly an introspective frame of mind of that kind is also possible, but it should not be treated as the model for all sensing. We direct ourselves outwards: towards the things and qualities that interest us, and towards others in a shared attempt to capture what is relevant about them. In this understanding, sampling – feeling the taste or seeing the colour of a

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1 Wittgenstein, PI I: §293.
2 Cf. Dennett, Quining Qualia, … .
representative sample – should be seen as part of the communicative situation, not as the opposite of it. How we go about in this interaction, and where our focus lies, reflect our shared understanding of what is important about the tastes and colours in question.

This may evoke the question how this activity is related to the undeniable fact that there seems to be something that the descriptions are about; something that should be there regardless of whether it is described or not. Surely sensations cannot be reduced to our describing activities. My point is not to claim, for instance, that non-linguistic beings do not feel tastes. But a discussion of the describability or otherwise of sensations will obviously have to consider their role for beings whose life includes language.

Perhaps we can say: Trying out different tastes, offering samples, and describing and discussing them, all belong to the same expressive activity. By calling the activity expressive we can focus on the fact that the relationship is internal between the linguistic expressions on the one hand and, on the other hand, the various other activities and experiences that belong to tasting and sampling. In other words, linguistic expressions of tastes are not simply reports of the subject’s states. The relation between sampling and describing is one of interaction between the two activities (or aspects of the same activity), where the one is shaped by the other. Savouring the sample and discussing its taste with others work in tandem as our way of discovering its qualities.

The views against which the main criticism will be levelled belong historically to the Empiricist tradition. To take Hume or Russell to task over the philosophy of mind may look like a dated project today. But basic Empiricist commitments are strongly present in the current debate. By addressing the more explicitly stated underlying ideas by Hume and Russell rather than the more specific views of, say, David Chalmers, Michael Tye or Jackson (REFF.), I hope to convey a clearer view of the shared background of the debate.

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3 REF: Wenjing, Taylor, Lawn, Rudd.
**Hume’s Pineapple**

In his *Treatise on Human Nature*, David Hume claimed that a person who has never tried pineapple will not be able to ‘form’ … ’a just idea’ of its taste on the basis of mere verbal description.

To give a child an idea of scarlet or orange, of sweet or bitter, I present the objects, in other words, convey to him these impressions; but proceed not so absurdly, as to endeavour to produce the impression by exciting the ideas. Our ideas upon their appearance produce not their corresponding impressions, nor do we perceive any colour, or feel any sensation merely upon thinking of them. […] We cannot form to ourselves a just idea of the taste of a pineapple, without having actually tasted it.⁴

Hume might be taken just to state the obvious fact that there is a difference between tasting the exotic fruit and merely hearing it described. However, he also seems to raise a more controversial claim: that the taste of pineapple cannot be described adequately. Or perhaps: your experience of its taste cannot be described. Or, again: I will not understand your description unless I have had the same experience myself. Or, at any rate, I will not understand it completely.

Hume got his pineapple example from Locke, his philosophical predecessor and fellow Empiricist. They did not focus on linguistic communication *per se* or on the limits thereof. They wished to illustrate the central Empiricist tenet: *simple ideas* are derived from *impressions*, which are created by the stimulation of the proper sense organs⁵. Yet the continuity between the two Empiricists and later discussion of ineffability is obvious, not the least at the level of examples used. Locke’s speculation, elsewhere in the *Essay*, concerning a child being brought up in a black-

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⁵ E.g., David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, II: 15: ‘Ideas’ are copies of impressions, ‘introduced to us in the only manner by which an idea can have access to the mind, to wit, by the actual feeling and sensation’. In D. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996. – Locke, III.IV.11: ‘Simple ideas, as has been shown, are only to be got by those impressions objects themselves make on our minds, by the proper inlets appointed to each sort. If they are not received this way, all the words in the world, made use of to explain or define any of their names, will never be able to produce in us the idea it stands for’.
and-white environment\textsuperscript{6} later fathered a complete academic niche known as the 'Mary' debate.\textsuperscript{7} As to the pineapple case, C.H. Vanderwolf, although switching the fruit, sums up in 1998 what he takes to be consensus in the field:

It is widely accepted that one cannot communicate one’s own subjective experience to another person. It is impossible to explain what a mango tastes like to someone who has never eaten one. Further, it is impossible to know what another person’s subjective experience is really like even when both have had an objectively similar experience.\textsuperscript{8}

**What Does a Good Description Do?**

Hume says I cannot form a just idea of pineapple from your description unless I have tried the fruit myself. But it seems that there is an obvious reply to this. I will know whatever you tell me about pineapple. You may, for instance, compare it with other fruit. This is indeed one standard way in which tastes are described in encyclopaedias, magazines, adverts and so forth. Surely the descriptions are there in order to give the reader an idea of the tastes concerned. Hence, Hume was just wrong. But in reply, you might make the following two points.

(1) You might point out I was tacitly presupposing that I have (or the listener has) at least tasted other fruit – or at least something to which to relate your description. In order to understand the description of an experience I must have had other experiences of a generally similar kind.\textsuperscript{9} I may build up an idea of pineapple taste in my mind by combining my preexistent ideas of sweet, sour, pungent, and so forth. Thus, you might still want to uphold the general

\textsuperscript{6} Cf Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.I:6. [I]f a child were kept in a place, where he never saw any other but black and white, till he were a man, he would have no more ideas of scarlet or green, than he that from his childhood never tasted an oyster, or a pineapple, has of those particular relishes.

\textsuperscript{7} Compare Jackson (What Mary Knew) and Locke II.I.6 on understanding colour after a black-and-white upbringing.


\textsuperscript{9} Fogelin, Hume’s Missing Shade of Blue. (REF). According to Fogelin, Hume implicitly holds that the problems of getting the idea of a specific untried sensation arise when either the relevant sensory modality as a whole is missing, or the sensation is qualitatively clearly different from sensations with which the person is familiar (not for a new shade of blue; but instead for colours, if the person is congenitally blind, and for pineapple).
point that 'simple’ ideas cannot be communicated verbally.\textsuperscript{10} While combinations of simple ideas may be communicated, the constituent simple ideas must initially be received via sensory channels.

(2) Secondly, you might maintain that I have now only achieved a \textit{superficial}, not an \textit{exhaustive} grasp of pineapple taste. A verbal description will never be exhaustive, you might say.\textsuperscript{11} At most it conveys a pale reflection of the real gustatory experience.

The \textit{first} response is justified up to a point. I understand your description because I can relate it to my previous experiences of other tastes. This, however, is not something that only applies to descriptions of sensations. It highlights the nature of communication generally. To understand a description is to be able to connect it with something already familiar. Some point of contact is needed, but understanding may take various routes. There will not be just one answer to \textit{what exactly} I need to know before I can start making sense of your description; hence this point does not commit us to any position regarding, say, the roles of 'simple’ vs 'complex ideas’. For instance, some distinctions between pineapple tastes – say, between raw, ripe, and over-ripe fruit – may not be clear to people who have tasted pineapple a few times from a tin. But they may be readily accessible to someone with wide experience of other fruit, though \textit{none} of pineapple. Conversely, someone who has tasted pineapple but \textit{nothing else} would not understand certain descriptions of it. To understand the description is not just to relate it to a particular taste but also to other tastes and to other things.

Thus it seems to be right that, if you have tasted pineapple you will generally be in a better position to understand the description – but with the modification that there are many ways to gain an understanding of things, and that some of them may take unexpected forms.

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{REFERENCE SOMEWHERE WHERE HUME SAYS THIS.} Also see Zoltán Jakab (2000), 'Ineffability of Qualia: A Straightforward Naturalistic Explanation’ (\textit{Consciousness and Cognition} 9, 329-351, 2000). Jakab distinguishes between ‘elementary perceptual states’ (p. 337) ('simple sensory experiences’ or states without 'constituent structure’) and other states that can be analysed as combinations of the former. Ineffability concerns the former.

\textsuperscript{11} For a statement of this position, see Jakab 2000. Jakab’s term is ‘informative description’.
What different people do understand, and how to make them understand, is something we find out as communication proceeds. Unclarities may surface no matter where we begin, but they are hopefully settled later on. A meaningful description is part of an ongoing exchange with other people. The peculiarities in each case will be dependent on our backgrounds, our degree of commitment, constraints on dialogue, and, naturally, on the purposes of the original description. In other words, what is the point that you want to get across? This also connects with the second objection I envisaged above, to be considered next.

What about the claim that your verbal description of pineapple taste cannot be exhaustive? To assess this, we need to specify what exhaustiveness would mean in the present case. Distinctions between the exhaustive and the incomplete get their sense from requirements of completeness. The minutes of a meeting are typically considered exhaustive when they contain the legally relevant facts such as agenda, the list of participants, and information about voting. Someone more interested in the general atmosphere at the meeting might still consider the minutes an incomplete description. On the other hand, a quick grin or nod might give her the exhaustive answer she wants. Connecting to the present topic: the description ‘pineapple is sweet, not savoury’, is exhaustive if the original task is to classify different groceries as either sweet or savoury. In other words, descriptions are not incomplete or exhaustive in themselves.

No description can be ‘exhaustive’ in the sense of providing answers to each and every question ever imaginable, as opposed to answering the questions actually raised. Thus speaking of ’exhaustive’ as well as ’incomplete’ descriptions only makes sense where a limited range of questions are relevant. For this reason, most human communication typically neither counts as exhaustive nor as incomplete. Most of what we say to one another does not consist of replies (exhaustive or otherwise) to definite requests of information. Our unregulated socialising involves the freedom either to continue on a topic, drop it and move on, or to end the discussion.

There is then indeed a sense in which our experiences, or any phenomena that we might describe, are never exhausted by verbal descriptions. That is in the sense that any topic could always be elaborated on and investigated further. As Wenjing Cai
points out – describing Gadamer’s view – "what is uttered always points beyond itself and unifies with the not-yet-said”\textsuperscript{12}. This is not so much a question of there being \textit{limits} to linguistic expressivity than of its essential open-endedness; as Gadamer says, "all human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid out"\textsuperscript{13}. The objects around us, too, are characterised by an openness and 'otherness', implying that there is always more to discover and say about them\textsuperscript{14}. At the same time the open-endedness of communication testifies to the fact that human relations themselves, within which communication takes place, develop and deepen without fixed limits. But it must be added that this is a potential rather than actual infinity. It is not to say there will not be situations where all questions actually raised have been settled. It is only that our exhaustive descriptions, too, may always open up new, yet-to-be-exhausted topics.

In sum, the idea that it is impossible, \textit{as a matter of principle}, for you to produce an exhaustive description of your tasting experience seems to be based on an unclear idea about what a successful description should achieve. It only applies in the special sense in which it may be said that \textit{no} topic can ever be exhausted. In a similar way, it may feel difficult in the abstract to define exactly how large an area is meant by 'here' in the phrase, 'stand here!'. Yet in a real situation it is perhaps not difficult at all.\textsuperscript{15}

\section*{Descriptions and Samples}

To some readers, these points are perhaps simply obvious if often overlooked. But the reader may feel that they do not really touch the issue that concerned Hume. For, in the quoted passage, Hume \textit{does} mention a specific requirement that a successful description should meet. The description should \textit{make the listener feel the taste} (or 'produce the impression by exciting the ideas'), even presupposing a listener with no previous experience of pineapple. And he takes it as self-evident that no verbal description is adequate for \textit{that} purpose. In 2000, Zoltán Jakab formulates the same

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{cai2011} Wenjing Cai (2011), Language as Universal Medium. Dissertation manuscript, the University of Copenhagen, section 3.3 p. 7. Presented at the Tuesday Seminar at the Centre for Subjectivity Research, the University of Copenhagen, 22 March 2011.
\bibitem{emiliani2004} Alberto Emiliani, XXXXXX : "our confidence in the openness (and otherness) of facts, that is, our trust that facts can behave in ways that surprise us and can be endlessly investigated". Emiliani 2004, 6.
\bibitem{wittgenstein1921} Commentary by Lars Hertzberg. – See Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Investigations} I: §88.
\end{thebibliography}
requirement by saying that understanding an "informative" description should "result in someone who has never had the experience [...] entertaining, or undergoing, an experience of that type."\textsuperscript{16}

In his \textit{Essay Concerning Human Understanding}, Locke advances an explicit argument to explain why language – or sounds – cannot convey tastes:

[\textit{W}ords being sounds, can produce in us no other simple ideas than of those very sounds; nor excite any in us, but by that voluntary connexion which is known to be between them and those simple ideas which common use has made them the signs of. He that thinks otherwise, let him try if any words can give him the taste of a pine-apple, and make him have the true idea of the relish of that celebrated delicious fruit.]\textsuperscript{17}

The Empiricist suggestion is rooted in ancient philosophy. Locke may have got it via the Sceptics ((CHECK SEXTUS EMPIRICUS)). In a fragment, Gorgias of Leontinoi, the Presocratic, writes:

Every sign is different from what it signifies. How can anyone communicate the idea of colour by means of words, since the ear does not hear colours but only sounds?\textsuperscript{18}

On the face of it, the requirement seems outlandish – and Gorgias’ seriousness in presenting it is disputed\textsuperscript{19}. It is hardly suprising that sounds do not normally affect the tastebuds; and it is usually not considered a shortcoming in either. Perhaps it is best to leave the dodgy argument by Gorgias and Locke at one side. Hume and Locke also understand that the supposed requirement cannot really be met.

The pineapple example nevertheless voices an important intuition. Hume and Locke emphasise the difference between verbal descriptions and \textit{samples}. The sample can do

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\bibitem{16} Jakab 2000, p. 331-332.
\bibitem{17} Locke, III.IV.11
\bibitem{18} Gorgias of Leontinoi, \textit{On Nature, or the Non-Existing} (Περὶ φύσεως ἡ περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος), as reported by Aristotle.
\bibitem{19} REF Kirk & Raven, \textit{Fragments of the Presocratics} (?)
\end{thebibliography}
what a verbal description, by definition, cannot. As Locke puts it, "we see nobody
gets the relish of a pineapple, till he goes to the Indies, where it is, and tastes it"\textsuperscript{20}. The
central point can be put as follows. It is a feature of (if you like) the language game of
'tasting' that, if you have tasted pineapple, you are said in some sense to \textit{know} the
taste. You will be 'acquainted with' pineapple. By definition, you are in a position
legitimately to talk about it in ways not open for others to use. If you have tried
pineapple yourself, you will \textit{of course} know it better than someone who has not.
There is a difference between first-hand experience and reports by others.

The question to consider now is what it is that you have and the others do not. Is it the
acquaintance with a certain sensation – or something else? You have a 'first person
acquaintance' of something\textsuperscript{21}. The question is what \textit{being acquainted with} the sample
amounts to.

In Bertrand Russell’s \textit{The Problems of Philosophy}, a related contrast is framed in
terms of \textit{knowledge by description} versus \textit{knowledge by acquaintance}\textsuperscript{22}. By way of an
example, Russell mentions the brown colour of his desk. If you want to know what
brown is like you should look at something brown.

The particular shade of colour that I am seeing may have many things said
about it – I may say that it is brown, that it is rather dark, and so on. But such
statements, though they make me know truths \textit{about} the colour, do not make
me know the colour itself any better than I did before: so far as concerns
knowledge of the colour itself, as opposed to knowledge of truths about it, I
know the colour properly and completely when I see it, and no further
knowledge of it itself is even theoretically \textit{//} possible.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} Husserl (Logische Untersuchungen I (?)): Pictorial consciousness/signitive consciousness (?).
concerning what is known by descript//tion is ultimately reducible to knowledge concerning what is
known by acquaintance. […] Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of
constituents with which we are acquainted’ (Italics in the original).
Russell knows the colour brown from his experience, while verbal descriptions inform him of "truths about the colour". A problem with this passage is that Russell does not ask himself what it is he knows from his experience. Is it simply this one sensation, at this particular moment? Or does it translate to some more general ability? When he says he knows the colour brown "properly and completely", he may naturally be taken to be saying that he recognises brown when he sees it. Russell certainly thinks his ability to recognise brown is due to his access to the sensation of seeing brown. But does this apply to this one shade of brown only, in these viewing conditions, or to brown objects generally? Moreover, if his knowledge is "complete", would he claim he never makes mistakes about the colour of brown objects – say in bad light or in a shadow? In short, what is the relation between his familiarity with this particular sensation and his ability to make colour judgments about brown?

Suppose Russell is familiar with the look of his brown desk in normal light. Suppose then he looks for the colour brown in his surroundings, expecting to recognise it by comparing with the look of his desk as he remembers it. Apart from considerations about the reliability of his memory, what we need to see here is that Russell’s familiarity with the sample does not alone tell him how to make the comparisons. He must understand the impact of lighting and generally know how the sample works in relation to a three-dimensional and materially heterogeneous environment.24

Russell goes to a furniture shop, hoping to find a chair to match his desk. To forestall problems about the reliability of Russell’s memory, assume he brings a colour photo, reproducing the look of his desk in normal light, exactly as he remembers it. The shop assistants will no doubt warn him that, given differences of lighting, his desk probably looks very different in the picture from how it would in the furniture showroom. They might advise him to take a colour chart back home and find an exact match there.

One might think that these pieces of advice number amongst what Russell would call "truths about the colour". Those, he supposes, are something quite different from his knowledge of the colour itself (his knowledge by acquaintance of it). But the contrast I am now invoking is not one between verbally articulated or otherwise propositional

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beliefs about the colour on the one hand, and direct acquaintance with it on the other. Rather, it is the contrast between being able to use the sample and simply possessing it without knowing what to do with it. It is not reasonable to reduce acquaintance to the mere fact of having undergone, and being able to recall, this or that sensation. The sensation is important; but only if you can do something with it.

Wittgenstein’s well-known observations on ostensive definition in the *Philosophical Investigations* connect with this theme. As he points out, a sample is not self-explanatory. We must know what it is a sample of. It is informative because its general role is already clear. The conclusion is not that the sample tells us nothing. But the sample works because it is part of a general communicative endeavour.

A sample *alone* does nothing; or rather, there is no such thing as a sample ‘alone’. A piece of fruit becomes a sample only because it is embedded in a context of questions and answers. Tinned and fresh pineapple taste different on the one hand, and the same on the other, depending on what questions are raised. In this respect, the use of samples does not escape the condition that, according to the present analysis, was also characteristic of verbal descriptions. Communicative context is essential for determining whether a verbal description is adequate or incomplete. Context is relevant, in a rather similar way, also when samples are used.

The mere presence of a sample does not determine answers to questions about taste, colour, and so on. In the absence of a network of communication and activity there is no way to pinpoint what the sample is, what it is a sample of.

Wittgenstein’s famous 'beetle in the box’ connects to this. If no one knows what is in the other person’s box (or mind), communication can go on without it. The beetle ‘cancels out, whatever it is.’ Wittgenstein’s point being, not that sensation is incommunicable or nonexistent, but rather that we cannot tell, even to ourselves, what it is except insofar as it belongs to a network of communication and activity. The paragraph about the beetle in the box is a *reductio*. The crucial wrong premiss is the construal of the relation between the sensation and its expression on the model of

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26 See Ludwig Wittgenstein, PI I: §§ 293, 304.
‘object and designation’\textsuperscript{27}. What the model overlooks, among other things, is the fact that we do things with sensations. For instance, we try out tastes and colours, compare them, and address our differences about them.

As Wittgenstein’s language games early in the \textit{Investigations} also highlight, the use of a sample may be treated as \textit{part of} the verbal description. He imagines someone using a colour chart to find red apples.\textsuperscript{28} In another language-game, the foreman at a construction site is pointing at colour samples in order to identify slates of various colours.\textsuperscript{29} Wittgenstein raises the question whether the samples should be seen as belonging to the language: “Well, it is as you please. [Samples] do not belong among the words” but “[i]t is most natural, and causes least confusion, to reckon the samples among the instruments of the language”.\textsuperscript{30}

A conclusion is that it will be more fruitful to see the use of samples as \textit{part of} describing, not as something radically opposed to it. The situation is not one where we first have a sensation and then stand outside it and describe it. The two activities are mutually supporting extensions of each other. A second conclusion is that, if we are interested in the tasting experience, it will be a good idea to look at how its different aspects interact – verbal and non-verbal, shared and not shared. People educate themselves about differences between kinds of pineapple, or of wine, or of brown polished wood. These are typically social activities, and in any case they involve reliance on what others say. In this context, my sensations are not necessarily authoritative. If I feel a funny taste in the wine I may turn to you and ask what you think.

This is a demonstration of the way in which human experience is linguistic through and through – \textit{not} in the sense that all experience consists of, or must involve, silent talking or propositional beliefs; but in the sense that sampling, trying out, being overwhelmed by experience, sharing one’s experience, and so on, also belong to

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\textsuperscript{27} Wittgenstein, PI I: §293.
\textsuperscript{28} Wittgenstein, PI I: §1.
\textsuperscript{29} Wittgenstein, PI I: §8.
\textsuperscript{30} Wittgenstein, PI I: §16. Thanks to Martin Gustafsson for reminding me of this.
\end{flushleft}
human communication.\textsuperscript{31} Pieces of fruit, colour charts and the like are parts of this. Tasting and talking about taste are not two activities that, as in Hume’s picture, exist uncomfortably side by side.

**What is the Sample: Fruit or Sensation?**

In the language game of ’tasting’, the sample is a concrete object – such as a piece of fruit. If you haven’t tried pineapple, then you haven’t – regardless of any pineapplish sensations you may have been undergoing. In the previous section, I took it for granted that the sample would be an object, something like a piece of fruit or a chip in a colour chart. However, we should note an important ambiguity about what constitutes the sample in Hume’s example.

The sample is understood either to be a piece of fruit or a sensation. The official Empiricist line, given the Empiricists’ general take on the role of Ideas and Impressions, is that the sample consists of the gustatory sensation. To have ’a just idea of’ the taste of pineapple simply is to have undergone that particular sensation and to be able to recall it. On the other hand, Hume’s and Locke’s discussions of the example hint that, in the backs of their minds, they still somehow think of the fruit, not the sensation, as constituting the sample.\textsuperscript{32} For instance, they take themselves to know that only those who have tried the actual fruit will have an ‘idea’ of this particular taste. This is in accordance with the language game of ’tasting’, but it does not quite fit the Empiricist model. There the important dividing line is supposedly drawn, not between those who have tasted pineapple and those who haven’t, but between those who have had a given sensation, regardless of what has caused it, and those who haven’t. Quite plausibly not everyone who has tasted pineapple (tinned and fresh, raw and ripe, before a meal, after a meal) has had the same sensation; and conversely, the relevant sensations might be familiar to others who have never been in the vicinity of pineapple.

\textsuperscript{31} See Wenjing Cai, Language as Universal Medium. Manuscript, Chapter 3 of dissertation, the University of Copenhagen. Presented at the Research Seminar, the Center for Subjectivity Research, the University of Copenhagen, 22 February 2011.

\textsuperscript{32} Also see ’The Standard of Taste’, where Hume initially states his official line that ’sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external’. He immediately adds that ’certain qualities in objects’ are ’fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings’. Finally, in his discussion of the main illustration (the protagonists discovering the taste of leather and iron in wine), Hume consistently treats the taste as a property of the physical sample (of wine, leather, etc) – not as a sensation.
A reason why Russell, as we saw in the last section, apparently fails to see the active contribution involved in applying his knowledge of brown to objects, is his unclarity (analogous with Hume’s and Locke’s) about how to define the sample. When Russell says he knows ‘the colour itself’ properly and completely, he claims this is due to his familiarity with a particular sensation. The object of knowledge by acquaintance is, for him, the sense-datum and never a physical object. However, when describing his sense-data, he constantly falls back to descriptions of ‘external’ objects: ‘the sense-data that make up the appearance of my table’, ‘the particular shade of colour that I am seeing’, or ‘the sense-datum which represents the sun’. The reason for this strange procedure is that the real object with which Russell is acquainted is unavailable for description in terms intelligible to others. All he can do is gesture towards it by letting external objects stand proxy for the undescribable sensation. His desk, which he by his own admission doesn’t know by acquaintance, stands proxy for something else that he does know but which cannot be described directly.

Now we also see that the problem is created by a restrictive definition of ‘sensation’. It has been defined in terms of inner processes while their every ‘external’ aspect has been systematically left out. Suppose seeing, tasting, touching, etc., are sensations; and suppose my sensations are defined as states of my mind, soul, or brain. Then ‘ineffability’ comes to play; for while I might show you things that cause my state of mind I could never show you the state of mind itself, nor my brain ‘from the inside’, whatever that means.

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33 Russell 1923, 73, 81.
34 Russell 1923, 81. – Russell has acquaintance of: the data of the outer senses; the data of the inner sense (thoughts, feelings, desires, etc.); memories; possibly of a Self, and of universals. – Russell 1923, 80-81.
35 Russell 1923, 73. Emphasis added.
36 Russell 1923, 73. Russell of course would say that colour is not an external phenomenon but a sensation. However, in the context he refers to the brown of his desk in order to specify his sensation.
38 M.G.F. Martin characterises that view (to which he is opposed) in the following way: “On this view, awareness of the objects and how they appear to be is one thing – the mind is directed out to the world – and attention to one’s own experience is another thing. The experience is merely a causal intermediary between the world and our knowledge of it: our awareness of experience requires directing attention not at the objects of sense but rather within the mind”. M.G.F. Martin (1998), Setting things before the mind. In A. O’Hear (ed.), Current Issues in Philosophy of Mind: Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement, 43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 165.
If the sensation constitutes the sample with which Russell is acquainted, the question arises: how is that sample used? The focus on mere sensation leaves it quite mysterious how we actually go about recognising tastes and colours.39

A possible objection to these remarks might go as follows. You cannot say the sensation is unimportant. Those familiar with pineapple taste will relate to your description quite differently from others. And clearly this depends on the fact that they have had the sensation of pineapple taste. When you say a particular pineapple is very fresh, only those persons can relate your description to their memories of pineapple tasting. Only they will appreciate what ‘freshness’ means in a pineapple. Others have experiences of say, fresh lemon or fresh fish, but they understand ‘fresh pineapple taste’ only via analogies. Their situation would be, in a remote way, comparable to that of someone who has experienced deep wells and deep thoughts but no deep voices, and who now needs to understand the expression ‘deep voice’. ((REF? SECONDARY USE?? Hanfling))

There is certainly a difference between having tasted pineapple and not having done so – but that should not obscure other differences that may at times be much more important. There are differences between those who have tasted pineapple only once and those who eat it regularly, between those who love it and those indifferent to it; and between those who eat fruit regularly, but no pineapple, and those who do not. One can, for instance, quite plausibly think that a lover of other fruit will understand what ‘freshness’ means in a new, yet untried, fruit, while your description would not strike a bell with someone uninterested in fruit, even if they have tasted pineapple occasionally. We should not take it for granted that there is this one thing called ‘freshness in pineapple’, completely sealed off from freshness in other fruit, in fish, in a forest, and so on. It is intelligible to think that, by training our sensibility to freshness in fish, we will also become more appreciative of freshness in fruit.

Sometimes it is said of piano music: ”These bars sound like rain”. The analogy opens up the music for me, helping me understand how it should be played – not too slowly,

39 ((If the sensation constitutes the sample, this seems also to blot out the distinction between feeling a taste and liking or disliking it. If two persons eat the same thing and the one likes it and the other does not, do they taste the same thing? (Kölla Dennett i ‘Quining Qualia’).))
not too markedly. This is quite different from saying that the tin roof sounds like it is raining. There is no striking acoustic similarity between the two soundscapes – rain and a sonata. But I am reminded of the soothing and nourishing, or perhaps also of the violent and melancholy character of rain. On the other hand, the metaphor also helps me hear rain in a new way: hearing the beauty of it. This is not a case of simply comparing two sounds (or acoustic sensations). The whole exercise is made possible, and it enhances our sensations, because of a wide network of associations.

The point is once more that the fact of having undergone a sensation is neither here nor there on its own. It will be important once everything else is in place. But ‘everything else’ here includes a communicative context where samples are discussed and compared.

**What It Is Like**

Up to this point, I have been contrasting Hume’s claims with reminders of the various ways in which tastes are communicated to others. But the reader may think this still fails to address the central worry – not perhaps one expressed by Hume, but present in today’s debate. The worry is this. Granted that we can describe the taste of pineapple in various ways; there might still be something else we cannot describe – namely, the feeling of tasting pineapple. This experience has phenomenal character, in other words, there is something it is like to have it. The philosophical importance of this lies in the fact that it cannot be described functionally or in terms of behaviour. Hence it constitutes a bulwark against reductivist accounts of the mind (REF. NAGEL; cf RUDD, TILGHMAN). Conversely, attempts to deny its ineffability constitute attempts to reduce mental states to linguistic behaviour (REF: DENNETT WHO THINKS OF IT IN THAT WAY(?)).

To start with, let me just state there is no reason why claiming that something can be described would amount to saying it is reducible to linguistic behaviour. But the real issue is: What is this thing that either can or cannot be described? Here is a representative enumeration of examples of *qualia*:

By *qualia*, philosophers mean those properties of conscious experiences which define what the experience feels like for the subject. The taste of chocolate,
the itch of a mosquito bite, the heat of the sauna, the shrill, chirping noise of a grasshopper, and the pale yellowish glow of the full moon are qualitative properties of conscious experiences.\textsuperscript{40}

These are properties of experience that, according to the writer, cannot be expressed in description. But note that the advocates of ineffability never cite examples of someone actually trying, but failing, to describe the taste of chocolate or any of the other items on the list. And they never consider to whom, and for what purpose, the descriptions would be directed. In fact the last item at least includes some attributes ("pale, yellowish") that we could imagine being expanded to a qualitative description. In any case, it might seem that examples of successful descriptions would be easy to find in literature.

The obvious answer to these objections would be that descriptions of whatever qualities of pineapple, chocolate or the moon would not describe what is distinctive about experiencing them. Indeed, there can be no such thing as trying to describe the subjective qualities of experience. Any words you might find for them would simply refer to publically available stimuli that cause the experience.

Generalising this division between stimuli and inner experience gives us a distinction between the external world and the world of my conscious experience, my phenomenal world. Compare this picture with a remark by Wittgenstein:

\textit{What actually is the ‘world of consciousness’? – That which is in my consciousness: what I am now seeing, hearing, feeling ... – And what, for example, am I now seeing? The answer to that cannot be: ‘Well, all that’, accompanied by a sweeping gesture.\textsuperscript{41}}

Why does Wittgenstein dismiss the sweeping gesture? Not just because it is “sweeping”, hence imprecise. The problem is that it would be a gesture outwards,

towards what there is to see. I would be pointing, not to the inside of my head, but to what is contained within the walls of this room and hence in my visual field. Making the gesture and uttering the words perhaps give me the feeling of pointing to something only I can see. The feeling itself might strike me as deeply significant. Only, of course, this would not constitute a case of pointing, exactly because it is essential that no one else should see what I am really gesturing at. Its evocative power can be sustained only as long as I can keep telling myself this. Wittgenstein discussed more or less the same example earlier, in The Blue Book, where he commented,\(^{43}\)

Now if for an expression to convey a meaning means to be accompanied by or to produce certain experiences, our expression may have all sorts of meanings, and I don’t wish to say anything about them. But we are, as a matter of fact, misled into thinking that our expression has a meaning in the sense in which a non-metaphysical expression has; for we wrongly compare our case with one in which the other person can’t understand what we say because he lacks a certain information.

The assumed difficulty here is not only that of describing one’s experience to others, but of getting hold of it at all – perhaps above all, of describing it to oneself\(^{44}\). It seems to be a case of trying to look inwards, getting hold of something and putting it into words.\(^{45}\) And somehow we find that every effort to do so leaves something out. This invites the question what kind of a role ‘the description’ should play here. If I describe something to you I address you. I wish you to know or pay attention to something, and I may want to make sure I have got my point across. When I describe my experience to myself I am not communicating. The question arises what it is that I cannot do.

\(^{42}\) See also Wittgenstein, PI I: §398.
\(^{44}\) A point made by Hugo Strandberg.
\(^{45}\) Cf. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations I: § 253: ‘I have seen a person in a discussion on this subject strike himself on the breast and say: “But surely another person can’t have THIS pain!” – The answer to this is that one does not define a criterion of identity by emphatic stressing of the word “this”. Rather, what the emphasis does is to suggest the case in which we are conversant with such a criterion of identity, but have to be reminded of it.’
Looking back to the argument of the present essay. We have considered different ways of understanding the claim that there is something about tasting pineapple that, as a matter of principle, cannot be communicated. To apply a traditional philosophical image, the supposedly incommunicable element kept being pushed 'inwards' – from properties of the physical sample towards an inner raw feel. The final incommunicable element boiled down to simply whatever is left (if anything) when everything else has been described.

What I am now arguing is not: 'Experience has no such subjective feel'. I am not saying that experience has it, either – because the 'it’ might mean different things. But I am asking: Why is it that our existing ways of describing experience are not taken to show that their 'feel’ can be described? Why might we feel that something is always left undescribed?

Perhaps the long and the short of it is: there is something one can call a first-person perspective on the world. And this may strike us as deeply significant. We should probably not call such ways of talking nonsense regardless of the situation at hand. But it does seem that, insofar as they are meaningful, their meaning lies not in epistemology or the metaphysics of mind but in a quite different direction. By speaking of my consciousness as subjective and lying outside your reach, I emphasise my individuality in much the same way, as when I say, ‘You cannot have my pain’. This may underline the ethical significance of the fact that each of us has a life of his or her own or, in the words of George Eliot, ‘an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference’.

Thus the idea of the privacy and ineffability of subjective experience may resonate with important tendencies in our thinking that are not theoretical at all. At the same time, it seems to me that there might be more adequate expressions for concerns of this kind.

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