

Berkeley's Particularism and the Explanation of Taste Differences: How Can Pigs Eat Shit?

Russell Marcus
Hamilton College Think Tank
February 1, 2008

Berkeley

“That which at other times seems sweet shall, to a distempered palate, appear bitter. And nothing can be plainer than that divers persons perceive different tastes in the same food, since that which one man delights in, another abhors. And how could this be if the taste was something really inherent in the food?” (Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, in Cahn: 121)

Berkeley's Principle

Two people can not have different reactions to the exact same experience

Corollary: If two people have different responses, there must be something different in their experiences.

Locke

“If we imagine warmth, as it is in our hands, to be nothing but a certain sort and degree of motion in the minute particles of our nerves or animal spirits, we may understand how it is possible that the same water may, at the same time, produce the sensations of heat in one hand and cold in the other; which yet figure never does, that never producing- the idea of a square by one hand which has produced the idea of a globe by another.” (Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter VIII, §21)

The Berkeley/Locke approach

- Explain taste differences by the different physico-chemical interactions underlying the experience.
- We must look for differences within the tasting subject.

Olfaction

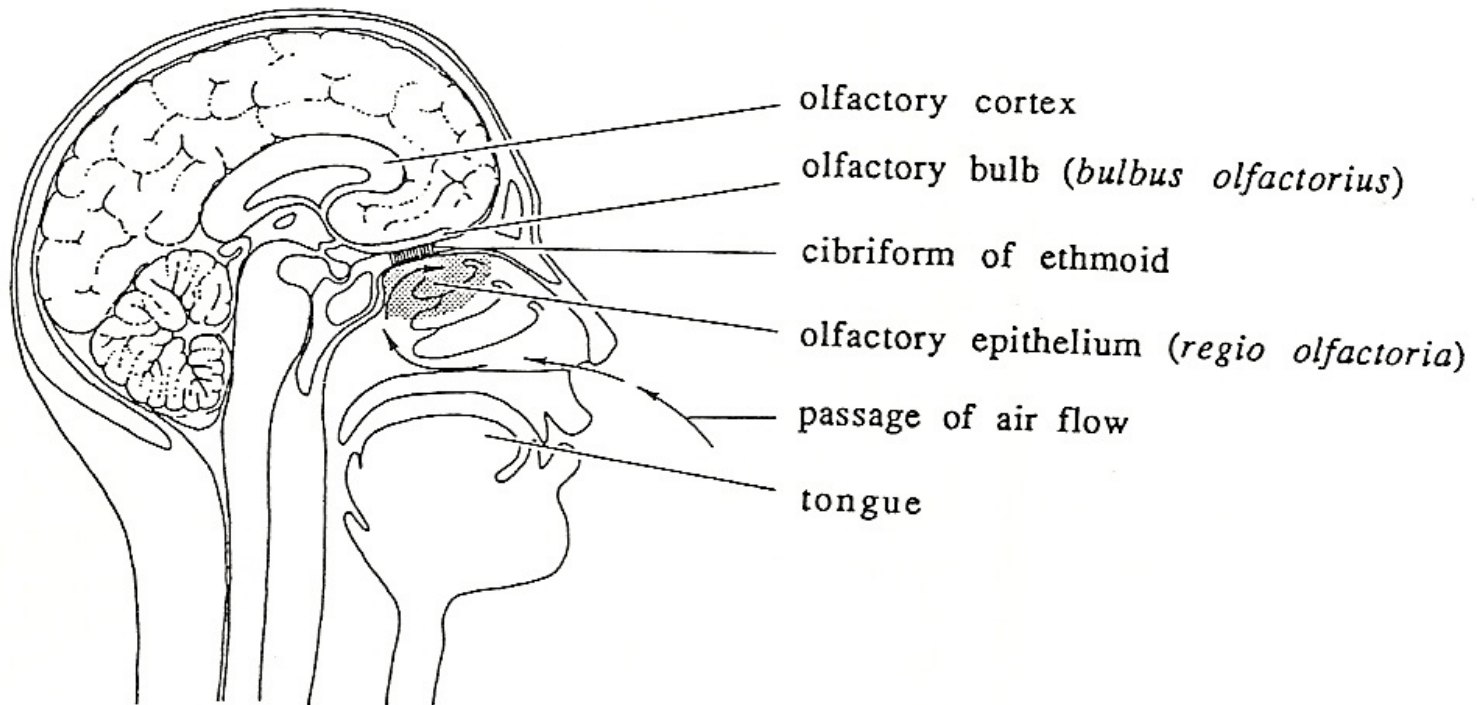
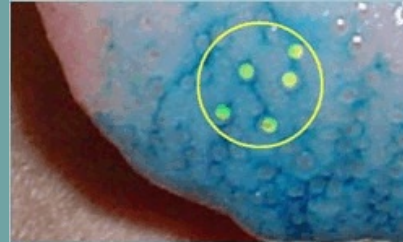


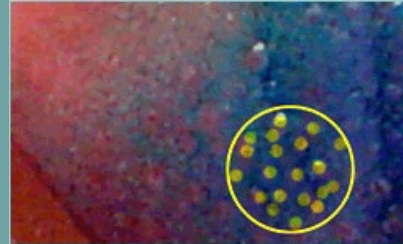
Fig. 1. Schematic representation of human odor perception

Supertasters

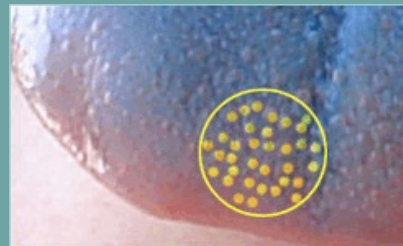
Non-taster
(25%)



Normal Taster
(50%)



Supertaster
(25%)



Cilantro

<http://www.ihatecilantro.com/stats.php>

"It's one thing to encounter the soapy, astringent, tongue-and-toe curling taste of cilantro in foods that are unfortunately designed to showcase the brutal flavor of this weed, but it's quite another thing that the cilantro lobby has managed to force supermarkets to place their product in the herb fresh herb section, right next to the Italian parsley. Who knows how many innocent victims every day casually and accidentally purchase cilantro, thinking it's an edible product--flat-leaf parsley--and take it home to use to garnish Italian dishes, pestos and other decent food? This has happened to me and let me tell you, it's an experience you will not soon forget or forgive. This tactic needs to be countered by lobbying the supermarket industry to put the cilantro behind locked counters with the cigarettes and chewing tobacco, where innocent victims will be protected."



An innocent bunny is made to eat cilantro for entertainment while bookies take bets on its life.

The Attitude Principle

- The Berkeleyan explanation of taste preferences is that different people experience tastes significantly differently.
- The other option is that different people have the same (or relevantly similar) experience, but just have a different attitude.

References

Berkeley, Goerge. *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

Lycan, William . "The Slighting of Smell." In *Of Minds and Molecules: New Philosophical Perspectives on Chemistry*, Nalini Bhushan and Stuart Rosenfeld, eds. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Ohloff, Gunther. *Scent and Fragrances: The Fascination of Odors and Their Chemical Perspectives*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1994.

Pulp Fiction