

“Red” and “Good”

Hagit Benbaji

The Occasional Papers of the School of Social Science are versions of talks given at the School's weekly Thursday Seminar. At these seminars, Members present work-in-progress and then take questions. There is often lively conversation and debate, some of which will be included with the papers. We have chosen papers we thought would be of interest to a broad audience. Our aim is to capture some part of the cross-disciplinary conversations that are the mark of the School's programs. While Members are drawn from specific disciplines of the social sciences—anthropology, economics, sociology and political science—as well as history, philosophy, literature and law, the School encourages new approaches that arise from exposure to different forms of interpretation. The papers in this series differ widely in their topics, methods, and disciplines. Yet they concur in a broadly humanistic attempt to understand how, and under what conditions, the concepts that order experience in different cultures and societies are produced, and how they change.

Hagit Benbaji is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. Her research and teaching interests include topics in philosophy of mind, metaphysics, and philosophy of perception. Benbaji was a Visitor in the School of Social Science at IAS in 2006-7. During her year at the Institute, she worked on the nature of colors, a subject which combines metaphysics, philosophy of mind and reflection on perceptual experience. In her research, she worked with the commonsensical conception of colors as phenomenal dispositions of physical objects, which form a *sui generis* category of properties, namely, their appearance, how they *look*. Her work is an example of one kind of the analytical approach to philosophy. This Occasional Paper argues that our intuitive conception of colors as phenomenal dispositions is the only model for a sensible realism about values. Among Dr. Benbaji's publications are papers in the journal *Synthese* on the explanatory gap, in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* on toleration (with David Heyd), and in the *European Journal of Philosophy* on Thomas Reid's theory of perception.

“Red” and “Good”

Philosophy has dwelt nearly exclusively on differences between 'good' and 'red' or 'yellow'. I have long marveled at this. For there resides in the combined objectivity and anthropocentricity of colour a striking analogy to illuminate not only the externality that human beings attribute to the properties by whose ascriptions they evaluate things, people, and actions, but also the way in which the quality by which the thing qualifies as good, and the desire for the thing are equals—are, 'made for one another' so to speak.

(Wiggins 1976: 107)

Historically speaking, Wiggins' claim that the striking analogy between colors and values has been ignored in philosophy may strike one as puzzling. Hasn't Hume's famous remark—"Vice and virtue may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold" (1739)—established "a long standing attempt to make theories of value and colors run in parallel?" (Lewis 1989) Why, then, does Wiggins maintain to the contrary, that "philosophy has dwelt nearly exclusively on differences between 'good' and 'red'"?

What is at stake, I believe, is not merely historical. Wiggins' dismissive attitude to the traditional comparison between colors and values comprises an insight as to the precise role of the analogy. This paper tries to illuminate Wiggins' insight; its aim is threefold. First, the paper distinguishes two uses of the analogy between colors and values, which I shall call the projectivist and the objectivist models. Second, the paper argues that only the objectivist model can show why the analogy between colors and values is called for. Third, the paper outlines the conception of colors which underlies the objectivist model, a conception of colors as phenomenal dispositions.

Before getting into the different uses of the analogy, however, I explain the common features of colors and values.

The common features of the rival uses of the analogy

Two features of colors and values form the basis for the analogy: the internal connection between objective properties and subjective responses, and the phenomenology of objectivity.

The internal connection. Values are inherently motivational; that is, the class of evaluative judgments of the form "it is good to do Q" is essentially connected to rational motivation. Judging that "Q is good" necessarily gives me *a reason* to act on that judgment. If I judge that "meat is murder," or, less extremely, that "vegetarianism is good" then it is at least *prima facie* reasonable to expect, weakness of will and other failures aside, that I will be *motivated* towards vegetarianism, or *desire* to become vegetarian. This belief creates in me a positive reaction, or sentiment of approval. Even if I end up, for some reason, not being a vegetarian, from the fact that I believe that it is good to be one, it follows that I aspire in that

direction. Failure to be motivated to act in the way called for by my moral opinion discredits the sincerity of this very opinion. The internal connection between what is good and what I desire to do is considered to be the mark of evaluative judgments. We can put this internal connection between values and desires in the form of the following bi-conditional:

GOOD: Something is good if and only if we would desire it (in the right conditions).

In this sense, values and desires are "made for one another," as Wiggins nicely puts it.

A parallel internal connection suggests itself in case of colors (and the other so-called secondary qualities, properties such as smells, sounds, tastes, etc., but the subject of this paper is the example of colors). As values are inherently motivational, colors are inherently visible; "colors are *visibilia* or they are nothing" (Strawson 1980). An object cannot be red if it does not tend to produce the visual experience of appearing to be red. We can put this internal connection between colors and perception of colors in the form of the parallel bi-conditional:

RED: Something is red if and only if it looks red to us (in normal conditions).

Colors are linked to our visual experience, as values are linked to desires.

Both bi-conditionals are necessary and *a priori*, that is, they are not based on experience. Rather, this internal connection (between colors and our visual perceptions, as well as between values and our will) is part of our *concept* of colors and values. A similar bi-conditional might be true of, say, being an elephant; that is, it might be true that something is an elephant if and only if it looks like an elephant to us in normal conditions. Yet, this is not to mark any internal connection between being an elephant and our perception of an elephant; this does not turn the property of being an elephant to an essentially visible property, for two reasons. First, the bi-conditional might be contingently true, namely, there might be a possible world in which the observer, for some reason, cannot see elephants, so that something might be an elephant, though no one would see that it is one. Second, and more importantly, even if necessarily true, the visibility of elephants is not part of our concept of an elephant. We understand what it is for some animal to be an elephant without mentioning that it is visible. By contrast, we cannot understand what it is for the tomato to be red, without taking it to be such as to look red; the blind cannot understand what redness is. The blind person misses our experience of redness, as well as our experience of an elephant—he knows neither how red looks nor how an elephant looks; but in case of color, he misses not just our experience of red, but also, what it is for the tomato to *be* red. Similarly, we cannot understand what it is for cheating to be wrong without having the appropriate set of desires, reactions of disapproval, and sentiments. Thus, if we could have imagined people with no moral emotions, they would be "morally blind" to the distinction between good and bad, as color-blind people miss the distinction between red and green.

Though this internal connection is hard to deny, it is not beyond dispute. At least for colors, contemporary physicalists tend to deny it, and hold that colors are spectral reflections, ways of altering light, or physical properties that ground these dispositions. Taking color to be a physical property means that the ascription of it is perfectly intelligible without mentioning visual experience. The reduction of colors to physics makes them part of

physical theory and hence, credits them with a neutral, “objective,” description, available even to the blind, provided they know enough physics. Such a reductionist approach is implausible, but my point is only to emphasize that anyone who adopts it cannot use the comparison with values. For such reductionism about values is even more implausible than color reductionism (“the idea of a reductive theoretical identification of values properties with some underlying empirical real essences seems plainly absurd,” McGinn 1983: 146). And in any case, if colors form no special category of properties, if, that is, they are simply physical properties, then no special comparison between them and values exists; the comparison could be made directly with so-called primary qualities—shape, size, or any physical property.

The phenomenology of objectivity. When we think and talk about colors and values we think and talk about them *as aspects of the world*. This is a phenomenological claim: it describes our commonsense web of beliefs. It does not purport to say what colors and values are, but how we conceive them to be. The phenomenology of colors and values in this sense simply spells out our naïve conception: how we think about colors and values regularly, when our thoughts are not spoiled by philosophy.

What is involved in conceiving colors as aspects of the world? We believe that colors are properties of material objects that exist out there, independently of our seeing them. Our conception of color as a property of material objects is rooted in our belief about the world, but it is also reflected in the way colors appear in perception: colors appear to be properties of things outside us. They have all the familiar expectations that go with objective properties: colors do not disappear the minute we stop looking at them, or when it gets dark; they do not change with every change in illumination, or in the observer's visual capacity. Deny these facts, Lewis says, “and the most credible explanation of your denial is that you are in the grip of some philosophical (or scientific) error” (Lewis 1987: 325).

Ordinary practice about values behaves in almost the same way. We believe that torturing women because they are women is bad, that slavery is wrong, even if all of us could be motivated to employ slaves. We believe that former generations who had slaves were morally wrong. This belief is not a *philosophical fantasy* but entrenched in ordinary thought (Mackie 1977: 31). If I am wondering whether it would be wrong to engage, say, in research related to bacteriological warfare, I am not wondering whether I want to do this research (suppose I know that I want to do it) or whether it will satisfy me (suppose I know for sure that it will), but whether it is *good* (Mackie 1977: 33).

We can summarize the objectivity of our ordinary thought about colors and values as follows:

1. Beliefs and judgments about colors and values can be true or false.
2. Colors and values exist (they are objective).
3. Colors and values are properties to which we can be sensitive or insensitive.

Claims 1-3 are indication of an objective discourse. Color-blind people may be *insensitive* to the differences between red and green, just as former generations were insensitive to the wrongness of slavery, or to the killing of animals. This talk of insensitivity implies that there are properties (colors and values), which any of us may fail to notice.

The first feature of the analogy, the internal connection between properties and subjective responses, is more easily denied when it comes to colors than to values. As I

already remarked above, physicalism about colors is not uncommon, and the view denies precisely that internal connection. The second feature, the phenomenology of objectivity, is more easily denied when it comes to values than to colors. Emotivism is the view that moral judgments are merely expressions of emotions or desires, and as such cannot be true or false. According to emotivism, there are no genuine judgments or beliefs about values; what seems to be a belief about values—the belief, say, that “vegetarianism is good”—is only a *desire* in disguise. When I say that vegetarianism is good, I do not purport to say something true or false, but only to express the fact that I like it. Such a denial in the case of colors is incomprehensible. Judgments about colors are purely cognitive, i.e., they purport to describe genuine states of affairs. "No-one seriously denies that colour judgements have cognitive content. Everyone thinks that colour judgements express beliefs." (McGinn 1983: 104).

In any case, this section aims to show that these two features, the internal connection and the phenomenology of objectivity, are both indispensable for maintaining the analogy between colors and values. Deny either one of the two features—that colors bear an internal connection to experiences by reducing them to physics, or that values are conceived to be objective by translating all talk about them to desires—and there is no analogy. Admit these two features, and there are two uses of the analogy.

The projectivist model of the analogy and its limitations

The origin of the projectivist model is to be found in Hume, but the position is best articulated in the first chapter of Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*.

Mackie opens the book by declaring that “there are no objective values,” and the main support for this pessimistic predicament is rooted in a one-step argument: the internal connection that values bear to desires entails that they cannot be objective. This argument follows the Humean tradition, which moves from the internal connection between values and desires directly to non-cognitivism, the thesis according to which there are neither objective values, nor true judgments about them, so that the three aforementioned indications of objectivity are false. That values are internally connected to desires entails that values are “queer,” to use Mackie's expression. Were there objective values, they would be “entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe” (Mackie, *Ethics*: 38).

Why would values be so different from anything else in the universe? What bothers Mackie is the idea of objective “to-be-pursuedness.” An objective good should be required by any rational human being who is acquainted with it. What's more disturbing, it would be required by anyone who recognizes it not for some accidental feature of human beings, which causes them to want this specific end, but because “the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it.” A situation being good “would have a demand for such-and-such an action somehow built into it” (Ibid: 40). The mystery lies in the idea of some genuine act, situation, or property, existing out there in the world, like being a chair, or a square, that magically “tells” us what we *should* do. A real property, such as squareness, cannot tell us how to behave, let alone elicit any desire in us. But the internal connection implies that values tend to elicit in us desires to act in light of them. The upshot is that an objective value is an oxymoron; a genuinely objective property cannot have a “peculiar evaluative, prescriptive, intrinsically action-guiding aspect” (Ibid: 32). The alleged impossibility of objective values

comes to the fore in the idea of Plato's Form of the Good, hovering somewhere in a platonic heaven, and yet tells us precisely what to do:

Plato's Forms give a dramatic picture of what objective values would have to be. The Form of the Good is such that knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something's being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it (Ibid: 32).

The queerness of objective values looks like the magic bottle of Alice in Wonderland, which orders her to "drink me".

The supposed queerness of objective values proliferates itself into *beliefs* about them. The very state of believing that something is good gives me no reason to act in order to bring it about. Beliefs and other cognitive states (i.e., knowledge) are motivationally inert—by itself, the belief that coffee is being served at three o'clock in Fuld Hall does not provide me any reason to go there and get one, unless I *want* to drink a coffee, to stop working, that is, unless the belief is accompanied with a non-cognitive state, such as desire. If moral properties were real, they would come with strange moral beliefs, beliefs which are inherently motivational—and which necessarily motivate us to act, by automatically producing desires in us.

The argument from queerness presupposes a sharp distinction between facts and values: no one can deduce an "ought" from an "is": no sets of descriptive beliefs can imply that one ought to do "Q." What one ought to do cannot be entailed by what there is. Values are queer properties precisely because they break this distinction between facts and values; if they were real, they would be connected to desires, and as such, would, all by themselves, tell us what we should do. Such queer properties, Mackie concludes, are not part of "the fabric of the world" (Ibid: 15).

But wait—we *believe* that stealing is wrong, and that helping the poor is good; this is, recall, the phenomenology of objectivity which dominates our practice. The challenge for the non-cognitivist is, thus, to explain why we believe that there is a fact of the matter about what is right and what is wrong, though we *invent* it; why we believe that killing just for fun is bad, though in fact it is bad just because we *dislike* it. Mackie claims that in believing, as we do, that killing just for the fun of it is *really* bad, we are in the grip of a grave mistake that suggests an "error theory" of our ordinary moral practice. But what explains this error? A non-cognitivist who banishes all objective values from the world cannot avoid engaging in the task of explaining the error; one can only reject the commonsense belief in objective values, Mackie concedes, "provided that we can explain how this belief, if it is false, has become established and is so resistant to criticism" (Ibid: 42). How, indeed, can we explain the belief in objective values, which flies in face of their being human inventions?

It is this explanatory challenge which calls for the analogy with colors. For as I explained above, non-cognitivism (no objective values exist) is deduced, in one step, from the internal connection between values and desires, and colors bear an analogous internal connection to visual experiences. The internal connection between colors and experiences invites a parallel argument for the banishment of colors from the world. Though colors do not tell us how we should act, as values do, colors force us, as it were, to *see* them. As values are to-be-pursued, colors are to-be-seen. But the very idea of *phenomenal* property, the

ascription of which cannot be understood without experiencing it, is taken to be, if not queer, at least extremely suspicious. Let me explain why.

"Phenomenal" signifies the way something appears to the subject; this is a qualitative aspect, of which only we can ask what it is like for a conscious subject to experience it. By their nature, phenomenal properties make reference to the point of view of a conscious subject—we would not understand what it is like to be, say, lonely, unless we were lonely ourselves; unless, that is, we shared the point of view of all the lonely people. And here the possibility of phenomenal properties of physical objects may strike us as a grave confusion: if the phenomenal is connected to a single point of view, how can the *inert* tomato, in itself the subject of an objective investigation *par excellence*—an investigation that can be observed and understood from many points of view—have it? Speaking of phenomenal properties of physical objects—redness-*as-seen*—sounds just like a category mistake.

The outcome, once again, banishes colors from the fabric of the world. And with colors, are also banished all secondary qualities, which we ascribe to objects because of the way our perceptual system works. Real properties are those which can be described without any reference to the way they affect *us*; they are intelligible from no particular perspective, or, from the absolute perspective. Primary qualities—shape, and size, motion and rest—are due to the way objects are in themselves, in contrast to colors, tastes or smell, which are due to our sensory apparatus:

these tastes, odours, colours, etc., so far as their objective existence is concerned, are nothing but mere names for something which resides exclusively in our sensitive body, so that if the perceiving creature were removed, all of those qualities would be annihilated and abolished from existence. (Galileo *The Assayer* 1623: 28).

Redness as-it-appears cannot exist with any connection at all to visual perspective, and thus, it cannot exist at all. Can we imagine redness-as-seen in abstraction from any possibility of perception? As Evans, following Berkeley, asks, "what, after all, is being imagined but experiencing a red object that is unseen by anyone *else*?" (1980: 274). No property can be both, objective, i.e., described from no point of view, and subjective, i.e., described only within visual perspective.

Again, we are left with an explanatory task: why we believe, as we certainly do, that the grass is green and that the sky is blue? That we ascribe colors as we see them to material things is a mistake, a systematic error, which is explained by the idea of *projection*: we simply project our visual sensations onto the objects, or, as Hume puts it, the mind has the "propensity to spread itself on external objects."

Let us go back to values. The challenge—how can we mistakenly believe in the existence of non-existing values?—is now answered: we project our feelings, sentiments, or desires, onto the world, *as we project our color-sensations onto the world*. The analogy is supposed to explain the source of error involved in believing that stealing is wrong. The answer is that the same sort of mistake occurs also in our unreflective thoughts about the color of things. Values are *projected* onto the world of real objects and properties by the *passions*, as colors are projected onto the world by the visual system:

the point of the image of projection is to explain certain seeming features of reality as reflections of our subjective responses to a world that really contains no such features (McDowell 1998: 218).

For Mackie, then, “projectivism” simply labels an explanatory thesis about how the error-laden discourse originated. Values, like colors, are projected upon the world, not discovered in it.

The objectivist use of the analogy and its applications

The starting point for any proponent of the objectivist model is the reluctance, or more accurately, the recognition of the incapacity to deny the phenomenology of objectivity. As Russell writes:

I cannot see how to refute the arguments for the subjectivity of ethical values, but I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don't like it (Russell 1960: 146-7).

In the same spirit, Czesław Miłosz writes about beauty: "It should not exist. There is not only no reason for it, but an argument against. Yet, undoubtedly it is."

The projectivist use assumes that the internal connection between values and motivation is incompatible with objectivity, hence disavows the phenomenology of objectivity as mistaken, and goes on to explain the error by the analogy with the projection of color-sensations. The objectivist, in contrast, denies the supposed incompatibility between objectivity and internalism, so there is no error to explain; values are indeed “out there.” What has to be explained in this model is how it is possible to have an objective, albeit subjective, property. The explanatory task for the objectivist is how the combination of *anthropocentricity and objectivity* is possible; how can an objective property have “a demand for such-and-such an action somehow built into it.”

This combination of objectivity and subjectivity is possible once the precise sense of these concepts is clarified. McDowell distinguishes two senses of what it is for a property to be objective or subjective. A property is *strongly objective* if "what it is for something to have it can be adequately understood otherwise than in terms of dispositions to give rise to subjective states" (McDowell, 1985: 203). A property is weakly objective if this is not so, that is, if we cannot understand what the property is without making essential reference to the experiences of it. In the weak sense, a property is objective if it is "there to be experienced, as opposed to being a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it" (Ibid.). A property is strongly subjective, in this second sense, if it is *not* there to be experienced, if it is a mere figment of the subjective state, such as pain.

Now color, McDowell argues, is a paradigm example of a property which is only weakly objective; to say that it is a paradigm example means that it is not reasonable to confuse its reality with strong objectivity (though Mackie ascribes this confusion to our commonsense thoughts about color). This is because colors, as we already noted, are internally connected to subjective states, while at the same time, they are simply out there,

i.e., properties of physical objects. This combination is best exemplified in the suggestion the Dispositional Account of colors (DA):

(DA) Redness is the disposition of the object to look red to us, as we actually are, in the right conditions for seeing the color.

A disposition is a power of an object to behave in a certain way, to affect other things or other perceivers. Sugar is soluble because it melts when put in water. Fragility is the tendency of a glass to break when dropped (with enough force). Similarly, redness is the ability of the object to cause subjective experiences in normal perceivers in normal conditions. The dispositional account thus incorporates the two allegedly incompatible features of colors, objectivity and subjectivity:

First, objectivity. Redness is an objective property of things in the world, because it is "there to be experienced." Colors continue to exist even when we do not look at them. In contrast to pain, our practice leaves room for mistakes and illusions about colors; there is a distinction between *being* red and *seeming* red: I regret buying this shirt, for it is not really red; it is actually orange, though I could not see this in the store's dark light. In contrast, I cannot be mistaken about my pain: if I feel pain, then I am in pain. The possibility of mistakes about the colors indicates that colors are "out there." The dispositional account allows for the possibility of illusion, for the connection between being red and looking red, exemplified in (DA), exists only in the right conditions for seeing colors (redness does not look red to us in the dark).

Second, subjectivity. The subjective aspect is illustrated in (DA) as well, for the disposition to look red cannot be part of any absolute description, a description that makes no reference to experiences. Colors cannot be described without mentioning the experiences they cause—(DA) makes an essential reference to how colors look, that is why the blind cannot know what it is for something to look red.

There is no good reason, then, not to take our practice at face value, and admit that colors are mind-independent properties of physical objects, albeit subjective in being perspective-dependent. As McDowell claims,

Secondary quality experience presents itself as perceptual awareness of properties genuinely possessed by the objects that confront one. And there is no general obstacle to taking that appearance at face value.... [A]n experience of something as red can count as a case of being presented with a property that is there anyway, there independently of the experience itself. (Ibid. 202)

Let me call these properties, which are objective and subjective, *phenomenal dispositions*.

The banishment of colors from the fabric of the world results, then, from confusing the two notions of objectivity. From the fact that colors are not part of the repertoire of scientific vocabulary, it does not follow that colors are not part of the world. What follows is merely that they are not one of the many *physical* properties of the world, that is, that they are not strongly objective. But this does not mean that they are not properties of physical things "out there." The mistake is, precisely, the move from the claim that colors are not among the

properties of physical theory, to the incredible thought that colors are not among the properties of physical objects. The mistake is to take physics as describing *all* the properties of objects. It is just a failure to distinguish two senses of objectivity.

Thus, the analogy provides a model for the possibility of the existence of values. Values are weakly, not strongly, subjective, that is, values are sensibility-involving but nonetheless out there to be discovered. Evaluative attitudes or states of will are like (say) color experiences "in being unintelligible except as modifications of a sensibility like ours" (ibid. 206). This does not mean that values are like colors in all respects. McDowell explicitly recognizes this. Values are not dispositions that *cause* a certain perceptual experience, as colors are, but dispositions that *merit* a certain subjective state, approval, or sentiment. Whereas the connection between colors and visual experience is merely *causal*, the connection between values and sentiments is *rational*. But this difference does not undermine the point of the analogy: that we can see values as embodied in the desired combination of objectivity and anthropocentricity:

Values are not brutally there—not there independently of our sensibility—any more than colors are: though, as with colors this does not prevent us from supposing that they are there independently of any particular apparent experience of them (McDowell 1985: 146).

We can admit, then, that values are essentially motivational without making them any more “queer” than colors are. What is queer is the idea of *strongly* objective properties, such as squareness, which has “to-be-pursuedness” built into it. Indeed, the idea of strongly objective property which bears an internal connection to subjective responses is not only mistaken but utterly contradictory (McDowell argues that to ascribe such contradiction to commonsense is very implausible). The analogy facilitates Russell’s astonishment at the thought that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that we don’t like it. Once we recognize the existence of perspective-dependent properties such as color, the argument from queerness collapses, and the door is open to values as well.

Criticizing the projectivist model from the objectivist perspective: the absence of moral sense

There is, however, another difference between colors and values, which I claim to be fatal only to the projectivist model. The point is that there is no parallel in moral discourse to a visual sense—there is no moral sense. The absence of a “faculty of moral intuition” undermines the projectivist model, but not the objective construal of values.

The essential problem with the projectivist use of the analogy is, to put it briefly, that it explains nothing. The explanatory pretension of the projectivist model is to point out that we project our attitudes into the world, *as we project color-sensations* into the world. Just to mention projection, however, is no more than to claim that our subjective states deceive us into believing in the existence of values. How and why do they do so? After all, we do not usually tend to project other subjective responses that are caused by things in the world. Though a banana nauseates, I do not say that the banana is disgusting; or if I do, as a

manner of speaking, I am willing to qualify my claim by admitting that it disgusts *me*; that this feeling reveals something about my taste, and my sensory organs, rather than a genuine feature of the banana. Similarly, when a nail causes me pain, I do not take my pain to reveal a property of the nail; the nail causes pain-sensations in me, that's all. By contrast, the phenomenology of objectivity is such that we believe that stealing is wrong, not merely that it causes a feeling of displeasure in us. The quandary is, then, why project our moral sentiments *and not* our feeling of pain and disgust?

How exactly does the analogy between colors and values help to solve the quandary? The case of colors invites a demystifying explanation for projecting color-sensation onto the world, for colors are given in visual sense, *in the same sensory organ that supplies information about shapes*. We see colors in the same way as we see shapes, by vision. Vision gives us genuine information about shapes, so why would we stop short of believing our eyes when it comes to colors? That vision is the source of information about shapes is, then, a reason to believe that it does not deceive us with regard to colors. Seeing that a certain object is square is a perfect justification for the belief that it is square. It follows that it is only to be expected that seeing that a certain object is red is a perfect justification for the belief that it is—really—red. Even when I have an illusion of, say, a bent stick in the water, this illusion is the explanation for my believing (falsely) that the stick is bent. Generalizing the illusion to colors, we get a mechanism that explains how projection works. We perceive a tomato to be red because it reflects a certain wavelength, and our visual system is such as to cause in us the sensation of redness. Since our visual system does not deceive us with respect to shapes, we tend to project those sensations to the tomato: it seems to us that the tomato is red as it seems to us that it is round.

No analogous sensory apparatus exists for values. Judgments about values are justified not by a simple perception, but by rational and reflective deliberation. We do not simply "see" that slavery is wrong, as we see that the tomato is red. We may see the suffering it brings, but in order to explain why slavery is wrong, we should be talking about not using human beings as means to ends. We cannot end matters by saying merely "I see that it is bad," as we do with regard to the question why do you believe that the tomato is red? In the absence of moral sense, parallel to visual experience, the question why we project our moral sentiments but not other sentiments or subjective states, is not answered by noting that we also project colors. The crucial explanation—that we see colors as we see shapes, and shapes are real properties out there—is missing.

One might concede that this lack of analogy is fatal, but not only for the projectivist. Moreover, one might argue that the lack of analogy is *worse* for the objectivist model. The fact that colors are *perceptually* given, just like shapes, implies that they are out there. But moral properties are *not* perceptually given. In absence of a faculty of moral intuition, we cannot count on the analogy to find objective values; we have no intuition that values are "there to be experienced" as colors are.

Moreover, the objection continues, it is, to say the least, surprising, that the absence of a moral sense is usually taken to undermine only a crude form of "intuitionism," the thesis which says that we "see" moral properties, as we see colors. Mackie claims that

the central thesis of intuitionism is one to which *any objectivist view of values* is in the end committed: intuitionism merely makes unpalatably plain what other forms of objectivism wrap up... 'a special sort of intuition' is a lame answer, but it is the one to which the clear headed objectivist is compelled to resort (Mackie 1977: 39).

Mackie contends that taking seriously the objectivist reading of the analogy amounts to modeling moral knowledge on perceptual knowledge of color, but taking moral knowledge to be quite literally a form of perception is extremely implausible.

This objection misunderstands the role of the objectivist model. The point of the analogy is to wipe out one set of prejudices—the prejudices that there is only one kind of objectivity; and that the only real properties are those which are or could be part of an existing or developed scientific theory; that only properties which can be described from no particular point of view are legitimate. The rest, all colors-as-we-see-them, are bound to banishment. Now I agree that the case of colors is exemplary because they are perceptually given, "there to be experienced." And it might be a further question, not answered by the analogy itself, whether moral properties should gain the status of objective properties. But what the analogy does is to eradicate one argument against it, the argument from queerness. Given that we already admitted that colors are objective, it is not bizarre to recognize properties which are internally connected to subjective responses. The one-step argument from internal connection to banishment collapses. The analogy explains not why values are objective, but how it is *possible* that they are. The analogy provides a model of objectivity to which values *could* fit.

The objection is still not easily answered. It is one thing to agree that the fact that colors are essentially visible is compatible with their reality. It is quite another to extend the comparison to values. It is an entirely different matter to let in values, which are such as to make us *desire* them, *care* about them, *approve* their existence. It is not simply a property which is essentially visible, but a property which is essentially required an action, or motivation. The integrity of talk about objective colors is granted, in part, by virtue of their being essentially dependent on *visual* perspective, but the absence of moral sense spoils the analogy. Dependency on desires, motivations, sentiments, and all sorts of attitudes of approval and disapproval is not like visual dependency. Dependency on desires and the like is incompatible with objectivity.

The answer to this objection is that values are subjective in the same sense as colors are: in both cases, we cannot understand what it is for something to possess the property (to be red or good) without having subjective responses (experiences of red, sentiments of approval, caring, desire). The dependency on subjective responses makes both colors and values, mind-dependent. Visual experience is no less subjective or mind-dependent than desire, caring, motivation, or sentiment. Of course these are all very different kinds of states, with different contents. The content of color-experience is that the object is red; the content of a sentiment is that an action is required. But this difference is irrelevant to the point at issue, which is that the mere dependency of the property on subjective states is not a reason to reject its independent reality. The role of the analogy is modest; it is just to free us from the prejudice that only properties which are not dependent on subjective states in this sense

are real.

The rejoinder of those who hold to the projectivist model is to exploit this modesty in their service. As the objectivist does not rely on the analogy to prove moral realism, she only removes one barrier to realism, so proponents of the projectivist model might argue that they do not rely on the analogy to provide a full-blown explanation of our error. The analogy with colors frees us from the prejudice that the *only* explanation for our beliefs in the existence of values is the naïve realist one, i.e., *that there are values*. The analogy points out that there is an alternative, anti-realist explanation: projection. The analogy ensures the *possibility* of projection, as its objectivist reading only ensures the possibility of objectivity.

Unfortunately for the projectivist, the very possibility of error was never in question. We are too familiar with various kinds of projection in everyday life. First, we project our emotions onto other people. As soon as a friend has something, however unimportant, the jealous person is disposed to see it as something he *really* wants. The lover projects her feeling on her beloved in a way which makes him seem handsomer, wiser, and wittier than he actually is. More universal and socially grounded projections are the result of the social structure of religious law. As Mackie observes, patterns of behavior influence individuals to believe in all sorts of fictional entities. We have internalized social pressures from the state, the church, and so on, in order to conform to the behavior and beliefs of others. Religion in general is the source of many sorts of projection. Christians believed that the Jordan River contained holy water. This is not just an individualistic belief, but an entrenched one, which was common to the Christian community. Socially invented prejudices were often explained as real phenomena or properties, evidence of the will of God. So *there is no need to appeal to colors* to explain the possibility of error concerning values.

Furthermore, Mackie himself draws heavily on religious and social projection to explain the error theory he ascribes to our moral discourse. He stresses the affinity of moral "ought" and "ought not" with the Christian "forbidden." As he says, "Ethics is a system of law from which the legislator has been removed," whether the legislator is the state or a divinity. Anscombe also argues that much modern ethics is a vestige of Divine Command theory. These explanations make the analogy redundant—we do not need to appeal to colors in particular; we can, and do point to the role of God (or any other well-established prejudice).

One might reject all these explanations for the projection of values as ill-founded. Even Mackie, who suggests such explanation, concedes that divine law cannot be the sole source of projection. The inadequacy of these explanations is that they do not catch the special phenomenology of our moral discourse. Christians believed that the water in the Jordan River was *really* holy, to be sure. But part of their ascription of holiness to water included the recognition that *God made it holy*. This is an integral element of the phenomenology of the objectivity of holiness. The projection of holiness comes with a mark *of its authority*. It is conceived to be an objective property of water, but for reasons beyond water itself. By contrast, the projection of moral sentiments comes with *no trace of such an external authority*. Now, it is true that moral values are often attributed to God. But this attribution implies that murder is bad only because God forbids it, and when put explicitly, the other way round—that God forbids it because it is bad—better expresses our phenomenology of value; values are conceived to be objective not in virtue of divine law, or state law. Or, at least there is a dilemma here, as Plato's Euthyphro has shown us: whether God loves the Good because it is good, or whether it is good because God loves it. By

contrast, Euthyphro’s dilemma is not even raised with regard to holy water; Christians had no doubt which side is true for holiness. That there is a dilemma with regard to 'Good' shows that moral discourse incorporates a different source of objectivity than that of holiness. If our discourse embodies an error, then, and we project evaluative attitudes into the world, this projection is a projection with no trace.

The challenge for the projectivist model is to explain the possibility of what might be called projection with no traces. Arguably, holders of the model would like to suggest that the only fitting analogy is with colors. Colors are simply given to us as properties of objects without any trace that reveals to us "who planted them out there." The claim might be that the analogy with colors shows how such a projection, a projection with no trace, is possible—it is possible for that is what we do in color perception.

But rather than helping the projectivist model, this reply restates the original objection: what explains how projection with no trace is possible for colors is, in fact, the truism that colors are given by visual experience; our sense of vision reveals them to us, rather than any other source. One cannot now recapitulate modesty, in order to suggest, on behalf of the projectivist model, that the analogy merely establish as the possibility of projection with no trace without making explicit how the projection works with respect to values. Just to point to projection without specifying any mechanism which explains how it works, in particular how it leaves no trace, does little explanatory work. It merely comes down to the ascription of an error to our beliefs, whereas we were after an explanation of this error.

Let me summarize my argument against the projectivist model in the following dilemma. Either the portrait of the phenomenology of values fits the phenomenology of holiness or any other socially projected properties, so that the source of objective values is, say, God, or it is special, a case of projection with no trace, whose sole analogue is color projection. If the phenomenology of values simply mirrors that of holiness or other social projection, then the analogy with colors is redundant; on the other hand, if values are presented to us as simply there, not in virtue of an external authority, social, religious, or any other, so that the analogy with colors is called for, then the absence of moral sense empties the analogy with colors of any explanatory power.

Colors as phenomenal dispositions of physical objects

I have argued that the analogy between colors and values can only be used to support objective values, by construing colors as phenomenal dispositions of physical objects. But there might be an alternative conception of colors, which does justice to the objective model of the analogy: the conception of colors as primitive properties. In this final section I argue that primitivism is not a genuine alternative, in order to understand better what a phenomenal disposition is.

Primitivism is sometimes characterized as a dream of Eden. Thus,

When an apple in Eden looked red to us, the apple was gloriously, perfectly, and primitively *red*. There was no need for a long causal chain from the microphysics of the surface, through air and brain to a contingently connected visual experience. Rather the perfect redness of the apple was simply revealed to us. The qualitative redness in our experience derived entirely from the presentation of perfect redness in the world. (Chalmers 2006)

According to primitivism, there was no Fall. Though we ate from the tree of science, for all we perceive and believe we are still in Eden, and the apple is still gloriously, perfectly, and primitively *red*.

Thus, primitivism goes against the banishment of colors from the world, and argues that colors are qualitative, sensuous properties of physical objects, which are *as-they-appear-to-be*; it accepts, that is, that colors are phenomenal, essentially visible properties of physical objects. They reject the claim that colors are *dispositions*. Dispositions, so they argue, are not phenomenal properties, and the very idea of phenomenal disposition is incoherent. Let me explain why.

Phenomenal properties of physical objects are *sui-generis*; they form an irreducible ontological category; a phenomenal property of a physical object is neither a physical property of it, nor is it a mental property of the experiencing subject. "To the old question, 'Are colours mental or physical, subjective or objective?', primitivism answers, 'Neither: they constitute a third category, just as real as, but distinct from, mental and physical properties'" (McGinn).

The recognition of *sui-generis* phenomenal properties of *physical objects* goes against the classic accounts of color. These accounts are dualistic in that they recognize only two categories of genuine properties, physical properties of objects, and mental properties of subjects. All properties fall under one of these two classifications, or a combination of them. Dualists may hold that colors are ways of altering light; properties of a sense-datum-like mental array; physical properties which ground dispositions to cause color experiences, or those dispositions themselves. In a way, the dispositional account of colors makes sophisticated use of this binary understanding of properties. It construes colors as complex dispositions, constituted by physical properties of objects and mental sensations of subjects, thereby elegantly preempting any need for mysterious *phenomenal* properties of physical objects without falling into crude forms of physicalism or subjectivism. Given this tradition, no wonder that primitivism considers "phenomenal disposition" as a category mistake.

This reductive approach is not, however, the dispositional account which underlies the objectivist model of the analogy. The crucial distinction between reductive and non-reductive versions of dispositionalism turns precisely on how to understand the expression "look red" in (D). According to the *reductive dispositional account* (RD) red is a disposition to *look-red* to standard perceivers in standard conditions. By contrast, according to the *non-reductive account* which underlies the objectivist model, (Non-RD) red is a disposition to look red to standard perceivers in standard conditions. A reductive account specifies the property expressed by "look red" in the right hand side without using the concept of red, as a semantic primitive: *look-red*. According to the non-reductive account, the property expressed by "look red" cannot be specified without employing the concept of red, namely, without referring to

red objects, so that both occurrences of "red" are used in the same sense. The substantial disagreement is over the question whether the experience ("look red") is prior to the individuation of the property redness itself. The reductive account says yes; for it construes redness from red-sensations, which are individuated by looking inward, "into the mind," prior to the experience of red objects in the world. The non-reductive account denies that we can ever look inward, without experiencing the world; there is no priority to the individuation of mental experiences over worldly properties and objects.

I agree that reductive dispositions, which are two-component properties, reduced as they are to physical properties of objects and inner sensations of subjects, are *not* phenomenal properties of physical objects. On the reductive account there is no substantial difference between

the power of the tomato to cause reddish sensations in us

and,

the power of the knife to cause pain sensations in us.

The knife is disposed to cause pain in normal human beings when they cut themselves. No one would say, however, that the knife has a special, *sui generis* property, "being painful." It has the power to cause pain-sensations, certainly; but it is not painful. If the expression "look-red" expresses the same sort of mental entity as pains, i.e., reddish sensations, which are identified prior to any experience of red objects in the world, then there is nothing in the tomato that differentiates it from the knife.

On the non-reductive account, the expression "look red" is semantically complex; it is an experience whose content is determined by the tomato's being *red*. The experience, the state of looking red to me, cannot be described without the property out there. Redness is the special look the tomato and the apple share. What it is for the tomato to be red is not to cause inner reddish sensations like pain, but to have a certain *look*, which is a *phenomenal* property of the tomato. The complaint of primitivism, that the "phenomenal disposition of physical objects" is incoherent, presupposes the reductive account of these dispositions. The non-reductive dispositions to look red is a *bona fide* phenomenal property of physical objects.

So far, I have explained why the view that colors are phenomenal dispositions of physical objects is coherent. I shall end by explaining why it is the *only* way to account for phenomenal properties. Primitivism argues, to the contrary, that colors are, just like shapes, more than dispositions. They are phenomenal, but not dispositional. It is true that square things, just like red things, have the disposition to look square in normal conditions. But it would be crazy, primitivism argues, to take the disposition to look square as a full account of what it is for an object to be square. Squareness is more than the disposition to look square; it is the categorical property which grounds the disposition. Similarly, redness has the disposition to look red, but redness itself is more than the disposition; it is the categorical property which grounds the disposition. To support the claim that colors are not dispositions but their categorical ground, primitivists suggest the following counterexamples to the dispositional account. Kripke once imagined killer yellow objects that killed anyone who looked at them; killer yellow objects are yellow, though they lack the disposition to look

yellow. That we can imagine killer yellow shows that yellow is more than the disposition to look yellow; for killer yellow objects have no disposition to look yellow, and we still take them to be yellow. Similarly, Johnston describes the radiation zone, the region inside the sun immediately surrounding its core.

From the conjectured physical character of its contents the radiation zone is thought to emit spectral red light. It is thus conjectured to be a radiant red region. However the radiation zone is encased within the convection zone, which is exceedingly hot; so hot that it is physically impossible for any sighted being to pass through it and so see the radiation zone. On any reasonable account of dispositions, it is implausible to regard the radiation zone as having the disposition to appear radiant red. (Johnston *The Manifest*: 19).

But it is surely red, Johnston claims. Again, the example shows that we conceive redness as a primitive *non-dispositional* property.

In reply, I ask whether the zone is such as to look like that (pointing to the tomato). If yes, then it has the disposition to look red (*like that*), according to Johnston, and no counterexample to the dispositional account has been given. Suppose, on the other hand, that Johnston is right to argue that it does not make sense to say of the radiation zone, that it even looks red, that it has a look at all. Then, the question is: in virtue of what do we take it to be red? The insistence that the radiation zone is, nevertheless, red, boils down to the claim that the zone has the physical structure that other red things have. But this is not a conception of an essentially visible property, redness-as-it-appears, which the zone has. I cannot think of an essentially visible property *that has no look*, and thus, cannot be seen. Conceiving the zone as still qualitatively red is thereby admitting that it looks like the rest of red things.

Contrast a parallel example about shapes; in particular, imagine that the killer yellow objects are all squares. And suppose that these objects lack not only the disposition to look yellow, but also the disposition to look square, for the moment one tries to stare at them, one is already dead. Though killer yellow objects lack the disposition to look square, we have no problem admitting that they are square. By virtue of what do we conceive them as square? Here we have a straightforward reply. By virtue of conceiving them as having four congruent sides, with angles of 90 degrees, and opposite sides that are parallel. This description tells us what it is for an object to be square without mentioning how it looks. That is why we can conceive the killer yellow object to be square even when it lacks the disposition to look square.

Colors, in contrast to shapes, cannot be described in absolute terms; that is, after all, the internal connection between the property and our response to it. We cannot conceive colors other than in terms of their look. There is no perspective-independent description of colors. Of course, there is the scientific description of the killer yellow objects in terms of reflectance types, but this description does not provide any redness-as-it-appears.

The supposed counterexamples to the dispositional account are based on the belief that our conception of redness is something over and above how it looks to us. Thus,

primitivism also undermines the analogy between colors and values. Could we think about a beautiful picture that cannot be appreciated by any of us? By us I mean all of us—even the most appreciated and respected artists of the day. I tried to show that we cannot think of colors without their looks, and that this conception of colors as looks is a conception of (weakly) objective properties. The concept of color, like the concept of value, is essentially tied to our responses in a way which can be respected only by taking colors and values to be phenomenal dispositions. Wiggins does not simply overlook the Humean tradition; rather, he clearly sees what is required from both colors and values, if the analogy between them is to be fruitful as explanation.

REFERENCES

- Callmers, D. 2006. “Perception and the Fall from Eden” in T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds.) *Perceptual Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 49-125.
- Hume, D. 1960. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed.). (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Evans, G. 1980. “Things Without the Mind,” in Z. van Straaten (ed.), *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P. F. Strawson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Reprinted in his *Collected Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press): 249-90.
- Johnston, M. *The Manifest* manuscript.
- Mackie, J. 1977. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. (Penguin Books).
- McDowell, J. 1985 “Values and Secondary Qualities,” in T. Honderich (ed.), *Morality and Objectivity* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul). Reprinted in McDowell, 1998: 131-50.
- . 1987. "Projection and Truth in Ethics" Lindley Lecture 1987, University of Kansas. Reprinted in McDowell, 1998: 151-66.
- . 1998. *Mind, Value and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
- McGinn, C. 1983. *The Subjective View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- . 1996. “Another Look at Colors” in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 93: 537-53.
- Lewis, D. 1987. “Naming the colours” in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 75: 325-42.
- . 1989. "Dispositional Theories of Values", *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary*, Vol. 63: 113-37.
- Russell, B. 1960. “Notes on Philosophy January 1960” *Philosophy*, Vol. 35: 146-7.
- Strawson, P. 1980. “Reply to Evans” in *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P. F. Strawson* Z. Van Straatten (ed.) (New York, NY: Oxford University Press): 273-82.
- Wiggins D. 1998. “Truth, Invention and the Meaning of Life” in *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press): 87-137.

