

*What follows is a good example of a paper written in the tradition of Analytic moral philosophy. “Analytic philosophy” is an imperfect category, but nonetheless embedded in contemporary philosophical discourse. Loosely, it refers to philosophy that focuses on analyzing the meaning of concepts, often through close logical scrutiny of the usage of terms. Definitions naturally feature prominently, as well as explicit (sometimes semi-formal or formal) accounts of the steps of arguments. An established current within analytic moral philosophy addresses whether moral language refers to real properties: in other words, whether conceptual analysis ultimately confirms or bridges the apparent gap between “ought” and “is” (this dates back to the philosopher David Hume). A moment’s reflection will reveal the genuinely tremendous implications of the outcome of this debate. Here, Singh carefully defends one version of realism about moral properties against several objections.*

## CHAPTER THREE

# CONSIDERING DISPOSITIONAL MORAL REALISM

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### Introduction

My aim in this paper is to consider a series of arguments against Dispositional Moral Realism, and argue that these objections are unsuccessful.<sup>1</sup> I will consider arguments that try to either establish a disanalogy between moral properties and secondary qualities, or try to show that a dispositional account of moral properties fails to account for what a defensible species of moral realism must account for. I also consider

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this article was published as: Prabhpal Singh, “Considering Dispositional Moral Realism,” *Perspectives: International Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy*, No. 8 (2018): 14-22.

criticisms from Simon Blackburn,<sup>2</sup> who argues that there could not be a corresponding perceptual faculty for moral properties, and David Enoch,<sup>3</sup> who argues that Dispositional Moral Realism does not most plausibly explain the difference between moral disagreements and disagreements of mere preference. Finally, I examine a novel criticism concerning the relationship between the diverse variety of moral properties and the range of our normative affective attitudes, arguing that the view has no problem accounting for this diversity.

Proponents of Non-Naturalist Moral Realism argue that irreducible moral properties are real parts of the world, and fit within the ontology of the universe in such a way that makes objective moral truths possible.<sup>4,5,6</sup> On these views, moral facts, properties, and values are *sui generis*, meaning they exist uniquely and independently of any other set of facts or properties. Views which conceive of moral properties in this way face ‘queerness’ challenges from skeptics and anti-realists such as J.L. Mackie.<sup>7</sup> Anti-realists argue that because moral properties must be intrinsically and categorically prescriptive, they cannot be objective, and are therefore ontologically problematic. However, there is one species of Moral Realism, called Dispositional Moral Realism, which is best situated to address such ontological challenges. Sometimes called a response-dispositional or response-dependent view,<sup>8,9</sup> the basic claim of this view is that a moral property is a property something has if and only if it is disposed to bring about certain affective attitudes in fully non-morally informed, impartial, disinterested, consistent, and otherwise normal observers, agents, or subjects under normal conditions.<sup>10,11</sup> The view emerges out of John

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<sup>2</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> Mark Johnston, “Dispositional Theories of Value,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes (1989): 89-174.

<sup>9</sup> Mark van Roojen, *Metaethics: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 127.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce W. Brower, “Dispositional Ethical Realism,” *Ethics* 103, (1993): 221-249.

<sup>11</sup> van Roojen, *Metaethics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 127.

McDowell's analogy between moral properties and secondary qualities.<sup>12</sup> On this view, moral properties are dispositional properties. If moral properties are dispositional in nature, they can be understood as non-objective, yet still real, and therefore do not suffer from a strange ontology.

At first glance, this view appears to boil down to some form to Relativism, where Relativism is understood as some view on which moral properties are reduced to some group's opinions, attitudes, or preferences towards them. But this is not the case. The conditions for what make observers, agents, or subjects fully non-morally informed, impartial, disinterested, consistent are not matters of preference. So, the view is not a sort of preference or belief-based account of moral properties. I discuss this further when I address the objection that Dispositional Moral Realism cannot adequately explain the difference between moral disagreements and disagreements of mere preference in the section titled 'Enoch's criticism'.

Dispositional Moral Realism is a species of the genus Moral Realism. I take any view that can be properly called a Moral Realist view to be characterized by the following three claims: (i) moral language has cognitive value, meaning that moral judgments are propositions capable of being true or false, (ii) at least some of our moral judgements are true, and (iii) the truth or falsity of any given moral judgement is not contingent upon any group's or individual's attitude, preference, or opinion towards it. Philosophers who call themselves moral realists are usually committed to something resembling this trio of claims. Whatever alternate or further claims one makes will depend upon what sort of realist one is. In any case, moral realists hold that at least some of the moral judgments we actually make are true. Because at least some of our moral judgments are true, there must be something for them to be true of. This is where moral properties come in. True moral judgements pick out moral facts, properties, and values.

Some forms of Moral Realism, such as Robust Realism,<sup>13</sup> hold that moral facts and properties are completely independent of agents, and their stances and attitudes towards those facts and properties. Moral properties are non-causal entities, and exist independently of any other set of facts or properties. Dispositional Moral Realism differs from Robust Realist positions in that, on the Dispositional view, moral properties relate to the affective attitudes of the right kind of agents in the right circumstances. For the dispositional realist, moral properties have causal efficacy. This causal efficacy is due to moral properties standing in relation with certain kind of

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<sup>12</sup> John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 131-151.

<sup>13</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 1-8.

agents. Moral properties are disposed to bring about certain affective attitudes in the right agents in the right circumstances.

### **Mackie's skepticism & McDowell's analogy**

J. L. Mackie argues for skepticism about the existence of moral properties. For Mackie, objective moral facts and values do not exist.<sup>14</sup> There is nothing in the fabric of the world like a moral fact, property, or value. Mackie's skeptical position amounts to an error theory about ethics. Since there are no such things as moral facts or properties, there cannot be anything like a moral truth, for there is nothing for our moral sentences, statements, and judgements to be true of. If there is nothing for our moral language to be true of, then all moral language must be false. Though we may think and speak of moral properties as if they were a part of the fabric of the world, this is all in error, hence, Ethical Error Theory.<sup>15</sup>

Mackie argues that if there were such things as objective moral facts and properties, they would have to be entities of an incomparably and essentially different kind than any other in the universe. This is because such properties would have to have a necessary connection to reasons for action, for they are intrinsically and categorically prescriptive properties. Mackie's 'argument from relativity' appeals to the widespread variation of moral codes between cultures and persons as a reason for skepticism about the objectivity of morality.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Mackie's 'argument from queerness' makes the claims that moral properties, if real, do not operate the same way as other properties.<sup>17</sup> Moral properties appear to require a special faculty if we are to be aware of them. This apparent requirement for a special faculty for moral properties to be epistemically accessible suggests a metaphysical problem for moral properties. It is a problem of how intrinsically and categorically prescriptive properties could fit into the ontology of the world. Because moral properties must be intrinsically prescriptive normative properties, they are unlike any other set of properties. This is what motivates Mackie's skepticism, and ultimately leads to the anti-realist conclusion that objective moral properties do not exist.

Mackie's argument relies on the assumption that realism implies objectivism. By 'objective' moral properties, Mackie seems to mean 'mind-independent and categorically normative' properties that in no way depend upon the stances of agents or subjects. Mackie conflates the 'objective' with

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<sup>14</sup> Mackie, *Ethics Inventing Right and Wrong*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Mackie, *Ethics Inventing Right and Wrong*, 48-49.

<sup>16</sup> Mackie, *Ethics Inventing Right and Wrong*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Mackie, *Ethics Inventing Right and Wrong*, 38.

the 'real' in a way such that if something were non-objective, it would not be real. That is to say that realism about morality implies objectivism about morality. It is one thing to say that a property, or set of properties is objective or non-objective (including the subjective), and another to say whether that property or set of properties exists or not. There is reason, I think, to distinguish between the objective and non-objective on one hand, and the real or unreal on the other. There is room in the ontology of the world for non-objective, yet real moral properties. I mention this because Mackie begins by rejecting the objectivity of morality, and ends with anti-realism about morality. So, Mackie's argument relies on the assumption that realism implies objectivism. One can be a realist without being an objectivist in Mackie's sense. Mackie overlooks the possibility of realism without completely mind-independent moral properties. Dispositional properties are one kind of property that are not completely mind-independent, yet are still real, and about which correct and incorrect judgments are made.

For John McDowell, subjective properties are those properties which can only be fully explained in terms of how they affect subjects.<sup>18</sup> The secondary qualities of sensory experience are one such sort of subjective property. The experiences of seeing red, or hearing a horn, or touching a table are not fully explained without mention of precisely how that experience looks, sounds, and feels to and for the subject. This means that for an object to be understood as being red, or hard, means for it to look red and feel hard.<sup>19</sup> Secondary qualities (like color and texture) are understood as features of the phenomenal character of a subject's perceptual experience. Such qualities are in one sense subjective, in that they are properties only fully understood in terms of how they affect subjects, yet we would not want to exclude them from the ontology of the world.

Secondary qualities like color and texture could not be features of our experiences if there were not some object to elicit that experience. It is not the case that phenomenal experience of secondary qualities itself constitutes those secondary qualities. Rather, it is the effects on subjects which differentiate secondary qualities from primary qualities. There must still be something in the object which presents it as looking red, or feeling hard.

This would be an objective feature of the object (such as a certain atomic structure, for example). Given that there must be some object that makes possible certain perceptual experiences, and that the experience is only fully explainable with mention of the subject's phenomenal experience, secondary qualities must be real parts of the fabric of the world, despite being in some sense subjective properties.

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<sup>18</sup> McDowell, *Mind Value, and Reality*, 114.

<sup>19</sup> McDowell, *Mind Value, and Reality*, 133.

Secondary qualities are not objective in Mackie's sense, but it does not follow from this that they are not real. The subjective property as a feature of phenomenal character is there in the world precisely because there are creatures in the world that can have that phenomenal experience, namely us.<sup>20</sup> There are after all, correct and incorrect attributions of secondary qualities, so we cannot be in the sort of error Mackie suggests when we make judgments about secondary qualities.

McDowell suggests an analogy between moral properties and secondary qualities. Specifically, the ontology of moral properties is analogous to the ontology of secondary qualities. Though moral properties may not be objective in Mackie's sense, that is, not mind-independent, it does not follow from this that they are not real, or that there is no moral truth. The mistake the error theorist makes is to think that if moral properties exist, they must be objective or mind-independent. But we have seen that this is a confused understanding, for there can be non-objective entities which are just as much a part of the world as tables, chairs, rocks, or any other real entities. In the same way one can make true statements about objective mind-independent entities, one can make true statements which refer to non-objective but real entities, like colors.

The error theorist fails to distinguish between two sorts of subjectivity. On one hand, things like preferences and desires are certainly subjective and mind-dependent. They are determined entirely by the particular mind of a particular subject. On the other hand, there are those entities which are mind-dependent, but not dependent on any particular mind. Secondary qualities are these sorts of properties. Moral properties can be understood in a similar way. It does not follow from them not being mind-independent that they are subjective in the first sense, or that they are not a part of the fabric of reality, as Mackie might put it. Simply put, realism does not imply mind-independence. If this is the case, then Mackie presents a false dichotomy in his conception of the ontology of the universe, for there can be things that are real yet non-objective. So, we can distinguish general moral realism from moral objectivism. As Kevin Michael DeLapp puts it, the former is the view that there are moral values not contingent upon any group's or individual's attitude, preference, or opinion towards them, while the latter is the view that moral values exist in a way that makes no reference to any features of agents whatsoever.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, Michael Pendlebury flips the definitions of Realism and Objectivism, stating,

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Taylor, "Ethics and Ontology", *Journal of Philosophy* 100, (2003): 307.

<sup>21</sup> Kevin Michael DeLapp, "The Merits of Dispositional Moral Realism," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 43, (2009): 4.

I treat realism about affirmations of a given type as the view that these affirmations are to be understood as factual assertions that attempt to describe features of a largely independent reality, and that they are correct if and only if they manage to do so. I treat objectivism about affirmations of a given type as the view that they are subject to adequate, nonarbitrary standards of correctness, and that there are a significant number of nontrivial affirmations of this type that can be known to be correct.<sup>22</sup>

While the terms Realism and Objectivism are used differently by different philosophers, the point is that there is a meaningful distinction between the view that there are non-arbitrary and factual correct moral values whose correctness is not contingent upon any group's or individual's attitude, preference, or opinion towards their correctness, and the view that moral values are only factually correct when they correspond to mind-independent moral properties. While both views take there to be factually correct moral values, the latter view is committed to a more robust metaphysics. This robust metaphysics of moral properties is Mackie's target. But the former view leaves open the metaphysical question. The secondary qualities analogy shows that moral properties could be real without being as metaphysically robust as Mackie's target view takes them to be. This opens the door for an alternative metaphysics of moral properties that are real in the ways important for factual morality, but not mind-independent, which is something Mackie fails to consider.

McDowell's secondary quality analogy gives rise to a particular form of Moral Realism, called Dispositional Moral Realism. Again, the basic claim of this view is that a moral property is a property something has if and only if it is disposed to bring about certain affective attitudes in fully non-morally informed, impartial, disinterested, consistent, and otherwise normal observers, agents, or subjects under normal conditions. On this view, moral properties are dispositional properties, and stand in relation to agents' and subjects' moral sensibilities. By moral sensibilities I mean the features of agents and subjects which qualify them as moral agents. If it is the case that moral properties are dispositional properties, then they fit well within a standard scientific ontology, and therefore are ontologically respectable, rather than 'queer' or strange.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Pendlebury, "Objectivism Versus Realism," *The Philosophical Forum* 42, (2011): 79-104.

<sup>23</sup> Brower, "Dispositional Ethical Realism," 248.

### Some objections: Blackburn's criticism

Because the view emerges from an analogy between moral properties and secondary qualities, one may attempt to defeat the view by trying to establish a dis-analogy between the two sets of properties. Simon Blackburn provides one such objection. Not only is something like color experience explainable in terms of empirical observation, we can also point out the mechanism which make this possible. It is our eyes and our visual systems. Our eyes are the mechanisms of color experience. What could be said to be the mechanism of value experience? If a person is blind, we can say there is a faulty faculty of vision. But in the case of 'moral blindness', what mechanical fault can we point to? When people fail to be moral, it is difficult to point out in non-normative terms where the fault lies. We can be easily made aware of impairments in our sensory faculties. The case is not so clear with defects of moral character, nor is there any clear moral mechanism for us to examine for damage.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, if our perceptual systems were altered in such a way that all things that appeared red now appeared blue, we would then have to say that 'redness' no longer existed in the universe.<sup>25</sup> After all, a thing being red is only fully explained with reference to it looking red to us. But, if we cannot be affected in this way, then we cannot have things appear red to us. But the same is not true for moral properties. If we were all to adopt the attitude that, say, the killing of innocent children was morally permissible, it would not become so. Instead, we would say that we have in some way deteriorated. Blackburn thinks this is where the analogy falls apart.

However, the problem Blackburn raises rests on a mistake. The sort of change that occurs when we can no longer experience redness is a change in our receptive capacities to see red, and not a change in the ontological status of red. Similarly, a change in our moral receptive capacities is not enough to determine the ontological status of moral properties. The problem with Blackburn's criticism is that it confuses the phenomenological with the ontological. In the case of alteration to our perceptual system, we can accept that there is a change both in how we experience and in the ontology of the universe. However, in the case of mere change in everyone's moral beliefs, it is only a change in the phenomenological. This is because we can still be wrong about what value is for creatures like us. Being the sorts of creatures with moral sensibilities does not mean we always make correct judgements. Such is the case with secondary qualities as well. If some red object is in a poorly lit room, such that a person seeing it would judge it to be, say, purple,

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<sup>24</sup> Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, 160.

<sup>25</sup> Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, 160.



I would not want to say that there is something faulty in the person's perceptual mechanisms. Such a person does not take into account how the lighting affects the color appearance of the object. As far as the object's properties are concerned, those primary properties which would elicit an experience of red are perfectly intact. Our perceptual judgments alone do not determine the ontological status of secondary qualities. Similarly, mere change in our moral phenomenology alone would not determine the ontological status of moral properties.

One may pose Blackburn's objection another way. If when looking at a red apple one was to claim it was blue, the immediate intuition would be that their perceptual faculties were defective in some way. In the case of moral properties, what is the defect in the person who misattributes goodness or wrongness to an action or state of affairs? Take for example cases of moral disagreement. When two people have contradictory moral views about the rightness or wrongness of an action, we might say at least one of them must be incorrect. But, if moral properties relate to these two agents' sensibilities, then at least one of them must be in some ways impaired. This impairment would be analogous to vision impairment in a person who attributes blueness to the red apple.

But, I do not think it is so difficult to identify such a shortcoming in one who makes an incorrect moral judgment. The shortcoming we can point to is a cognitive one. The 'mechanism' which errs when we make incorrect moral judgements is no mechanism at all. Instead, it is the cognitive faculties which allow us to practice rational deliberation. Moral judgements are products of a certain deliberative process, specifically products of the processes of moral and practical deliberation. We think about what we take to be morally considerable and valuable when taking on the project of moral or practical deliberation, thus engaging our faculty of practical deliberation. And it is here where we can identify the source of the problem. We are not infallible when it comes to the project of moral deliberation and practical reason. So, it is easy to see why and how we sometimes make mistakes. If the making of moral judgments is necessarily connected to the project of practical deliberation, then a fallible faculty or process of deliberation explains why we sometimes make incorrect moral judgements. Perhaps there is issue with referring to errors in practical deliberation as 'shortcomings' or 'impairments' given that we are fallible by our very nature, and referring to our reflective capacities as being housed in a 'mechanism'. But, all that is required is an explanation of why and how it is that we make incorrect moral judgements. The answer is that we are imperfect when it comes to such projects. We needn't commit ourselves to

the language of ‘impairment’ when speaking of our less than perfect deliberative capacities and processes.

### **Further dis-analogy criticisms**

Still, there is further disparity between moral properties and secondary qualities. Secondary qualities cause us to have certain experiences. The seeing of a red apple elicits the phenomenal experience of redness. We have access to that which elicits this experience of redness. The property within the object makes possible for us a certain phenomenal experience. There is some primary property of the apple which makes it the case that I will have an experience of redness when I look at it. However, an analogous primary property is absent for moral properties.

A serious problem for Dispositional Realism has to do with how moral properties, if they are dispositional properties like secondary qualities, are grounded. As discussed earlier, secondary qualities are predicated on primary qualities. In addition to the existence of creatures with perceptual faculties, the existence of secondary qualities is grounded in the existence of primary qualities which give rise to them. It is the objective property in conjunction with subjects which gives rise to secondary qualities. Secondary qualities are grounded in non-dispositional mind-independent properties, and if moral properties are like them, they too must be grounded in some non-dispositional mind-independent properties. After all, the attraction of Dispositional Realism is that it makes moral properties ontologically respectable by putting them on the same footing as secondary qualities.

The first thing I will say concerns the purpose (and limitations) of the analogy with secondary qualities. It is not that moral properties *are* secondary qualities, nor is it that the metaphysics of morals is identical to the metaphysics of secondary qualities. The analogy between moral properties and secondary qualities is to show that moral properties can be real features of the ontology of the world without being mind-independent. It is in this way the two sets of properties are on the same footing. That moral properties are unlike objective properties due to their being intrinsically normative is no reason to think they are unreal, for there is room in the ontology of the world for non-objective properties.

As far as the grounding of these properties goes, I have said that we can think of moral properties as dispositional properties, and it may be argued that this requires an account of how they are grounded. This assumes that all dispositional properties need to be grounded on some non-dispositional mind-independent property, and therefore any defensible account needs to provide an explanation for this. However, this is not the case. It does not

follow from some dispositional properties being grounded in non-dispositional mind-independent properties that all dispositional properties are. Furthermore, it is not clear to me that they need to be grounded in this way. The important feature of dispositional properties is their relationship with subjects, not in how they are grounded. Moral properties can still be dispositional without going into a story of whether or not they are grounded in some other non-dispositional mind-independent properties. What is important for Dispositional Realism is that moral properties are the sort of properties that would affect informed, impartial, disinterested, consistent, and otherwise normal observers, agents, or subjects under normal conditions. It is a mistake to think that they can only be such properties if they are grounded in some non-dispositional mind-independent properties, for they may not need to, and thinking so overlooks the more important relational nature of dispositional properties.

As mentioned, such properties do not require the actual existence of subjects. They differ from other sorts of dispositions in that moral properties, being normative, do not merely elicit certain attitudes, but *merit* them.<sup>26</sup> To distinguish meriting from merely eliciting, we can say that to merit a certain attitude means for the adoption of that attitude to not be guaranteed. We ought to have a certain attitude even if we do not actually have it. Consider the example of fearfulness. Something can still be fearsome, meaning that it deserves to be feared, without actually instilling fear in anyone. It would not make sense to talk about something as fearful without reference to features of subjects that could feel fear, but there need not be any actual feelings of fear for the thing to be worthy of our fear. Moral properties are like this. They do not *merely* elicit certain responses. Instead, certain attitudes are owed. And they are owed independently of whether or not the subject ends up actually adopting them. When an agent fails to adopt the appropriate attitude, it means their moral receptive capacity is not right. Such an agent is not the right kind of agent, or is not in the right conditions.

The distinction between eliciting and meriting may look like it creates a further problem for Dispositional Realism, as it is a dis-analogy between moral properties and secondary qualities. But there may yet be a normative nature to judgements about secondary quality experience. When a normal observer sees a red apple in normal circumstances some sort of judgement would be merited. The experience of redness is elicited and a judgment of redness is merited. An observer who experiences the apple's redness would seem to be doing something wrong if they were to have the experience of redness but make a judgment of something other than redness. This suggests that perhaps even elements of secondary quality experience merit some sort

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<sup>26</sup> McDowell, *Mind Value, and Reality*, 148.

of attitude from normal observers. If that is the case, then the distinction between eliciting and meriting is not a problem for the analogy between moral properties and secondary qualities. And as already mentioned, it does not follow from moral properties being intrinsically normative, or not objective, that they do not exist.

### Enoch's criticism

David Enoch contrasts response-dispositional views with his own Robust Realist view. Enoch argues that the Robust Realist view (the view that there are irreducible and mind-independent moral properties) can more plausibly explain the distinction between different sorts of disagreements, and therefore has more “plausibility points” when compared to response-dispositional views like Dispositional Moral Realism.<sup>27</sup> Enoch argues that the Robust Realist is able to more plausibly explain the distinction between moral disagreements and disagreements of mere preference.<sup>28</sup> The difference for the Robust Realist is that morality is impartial, as it operates on a standard where norms are independent of persons and their responses, whereas preferences are completely dependent upon the particular subject. But someone who thinks that moral facts require reference to the affective attitudes of subjects cannot explain this distinction as effectively as the Robust Realist.

The Dispositional Realist might only be able to describe the difference between moral disagreement and disagreements of mere preference in terms of the affective attitudes of an agent. But the preferences one has are also themselves attitudes, which are purely in the subject. The problem for response-dispositional views like Dispositional Realism is that they must explain why the responses agents have to moral situations are somehow normatively special in a way that responses to preferential situations are not. Positions that focus on the affective attitudes of agents risk sounding like Subjectivist positions, as such attitudes are located within the particular subject, and such views do not have much to say when trying to explain *why* the responses to morality are normatively special over and above mere matters of preference. Dispositional accounts of morality are sometimes thought to be a sort of Subjectivism rather than Realism.<sup>29</sup> Preference or belief-based accounts of moral properties are typically considered mind-dependent accounts, while Dispositional Realism is not, despite its focus on affective attitudes. So, it looks like the territory is carved up in a way that it

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<sup>27</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> van Roojen, *Metaethics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 127.

should not be. Dispositional Realism is split up with other mind-dependent views when it perhaps ought to be categorized as a sort of Subjectivist account given the references to affective attitudes. However, it is a mistake to group Dispositional Realism with Subjectivist accounts of morality.

The mistake is to think that moral properties are identical to or reducible to subjects' affective attitudes. If this were the case, then morality would not be impartial. But, like the Robust Realist, the Dispositional Realist also holds that morality is impartial, and that moral disagreement is like factual disagreement. The difference with Dispositional Realism and Enoch's Robust Realism is that Robust Realism conceives of moral facts as completely mind-independent, with no reference to subjects. While Dispositional Realism does concern itself with the responses of subjects, the view is not that morality *depends* upon certain responses, nor is it that moral properties are identical or reducible to those responses. For Dispositional Moral Realism, moral properties are still non-arbitrary and not dependent upon an individual's or group's stance towards them. Instead, moral properties are properties which *would* bring about certain responses in informed, impartial, and otherwise normal subjects in normal circumstances. Consider that if Enoch's impartiality argument applies to response dependence accounts of morality, then it applies to response dependence accounts of color. But disagreements about color are exactly the kind that it is appropriate to stand one's ground on. Dispositional Moral Realism differs from Robust Realism by assigning moral properties causal efficacy, but maintains in common that moral properties are categorically normative properties and that morality is impartial. So, Enoch's impartiality argument is not a problem for the view.

A possible counterexample to my claim that it is appropriate to stand one's ground when disagreeing about color is the viral internet sensation known as 'The Dress'. In early 2015, a photograph of a dress caused significant disagreement when viewers debated whether the dress was blue and black, or if it was white and gold. Two viewers with ordinary perceptual capacities could look at the photograph with one saying the dress was blue and black while the other saying it was white and gold. If it is the case that different agents see the dress differently, then one might say that one ought not to stand one's ground on the color of the dress.

The general issue with the dress case is how illusions complicate disagreements about color. The photograph of the dress to my eyes appeared white and gold, but once new photos of the dress were released it was concluded that the dress was blue and black. Once I saw what the dress really looked like, I understood my perception of its color in the viral photo to be illusory. Once I knew my perception was illusory, I knew not to stand

my ground on the claim that it was white and gold, and instead say it was blue and black. I see the dress as white and gold but know that it is in fact blue and black. This shows that my beliefs about the color of the dress depend upon more than the color experience I have when viewing it. Had no new photos of the dress been released, it would remain appropriate for anyone to stand their ground on whatever they thought of its color, because their perceptual experience would have been the only evidence available to them. Once further evidence becomes available one can change their stance. In this way, one remains impartial. But until then, it is appropriate for them to stand their ground. Thus, even though color experiences can be illusory, they are non-arbitrary and thus one is not being partial if standing their ground in cases of disagreement. This means the analogy between secondary qualities, such as color, and moral properties does not lead to a form of Subjectivism.

Moral properties are external to subjects, but do relate to subjects in that they would bring about certain affective attitudes in the appropriate kinds of subjects in normal circumstances. Affective attitudes do not constitute moral reality, but demonstrate how it is possible to be in touch with it. Since a moral property is a property that would bring about certain affective attitudes in normal subjects in normal conditions, and not a property that is identical or reducible to those affective attitudes, and the criteria for normal subjects and normal conditions is not dependent on anyone's preferences or opinions towards them, the view should not be confused with a sort of Subjectivism. If that is the case, then Dispositional Moral Realism does not lose plausibility points, as there is no reason to think it cannot explain the distinction between factual disagreement and disagreements of mere preference. The view is still a realist view on which morality is impartial, and therefore accounts for different sorts of disagreement just as other realist views have.

### **The diversity criticism**

Another problem for the view is what I call the 'diversity problem'. The diversity problem is that Dispositional Realism would have to account for a diversity of affective attitudes in order to account for a diversity of moral properties. We ordinarily distinguish among a wide variety of moral properties such as the right, the good, the just, the fair, the wrong, the bad, and so on. A defensible view of moral properties needs to do justice to the wide varieties of moral properties. So, if Dispositional Realism is a defensible view, then it must be able to account for the wide diversity of moral properties. The thought is that there must be a distinct affective

attitude for each distinct moral property. However, one might think the range of our actual attitudes is not fine-grained enough to correspond with the range distinctions between the varieties of moral properties. If so, the Dispositional Realism cannot explain the difference between distinct moral properties, and is therefore false.

It is not clear that there need to be distinct affective attitudes which correspond to the distinct moral properties. On the Dispositional Realist view, there is no commitment to a 1-to-1 correspondence between moral properties and affective attitudes. The only commitment is that moral properties would bring about certain affective attitudes in the right kinds of agents in normal circumstances. There is no claim about moral properties bringing about or being paired with any specific attitudes. It may be the case that some moral property is appropriately paired with a variety of normative attitudes. This would explain why people respond to normative situations differently even when they make the same normative judgments in those situations. For example, witnessing a murder may result in shock, fear, anger, or any other negative normative attitude, yet all of these responses are consistent with judging the murder to be wrong. Each of these attitudes is appropriate given the action or state of affairs at hand. There is a variety of attitudes one can appropriately adopt in response to a single moral situation. So, the diversity problem can be solved by denying the need for a 1-to-1 correspondence between moral properties and affective attitudes, and accepting that a variety of attitudes may be appropriate for any given moral situation. But, this may be unsatisfactory, for it matters which set of attitudes are appropriate responses to which situations.

Even if there needed to be a 1-to-1 correspondence between distinct moral properties and distinct attitudes, the diversity problem can still be dealt with. Those who maintain this objection may say that our normative attitudes are not fine-grained enough to correspond with a wide range of distinct moral properties. But this is not true. We have a very diverse range of normative attitudes. This is made evident by the range of social normative reactive attitudes that exist between the extremes of resentment and gratitude. These extreme attitudes are reactions to the normative features of other persons, actions, or states of affairs. One may adopt an attitude of resentment if they are wronged or an attitude of gratitude if they feel especially appreciative of something. The two are distinct reactive attitudes at opposite ends of a spectrum of normative attitudes. It is not as though these are the only normative attitudes people can adopt. Most of the reactive attitudes people adopt exist in-between these two extremes.<sup>30</sup> For example,

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<sup>30</sup> Strawson, Peter. "Freedom and Resentment." In *Proceedings of the British Academy*, ed by Gary Watson (Oxford): Oxford University Press, 1962), 1-25.

if a person is slightly inconvenienced, as opposed to wronged outright, they may not be resentful, only disgruntled, in most cases. Similarly, if a person is on the receiving end of a kind gesture, they may not show the utmost gratitude, but nevertheless be thankful. Additionally, we can recognize appropriate or inappropriate reactions to certain situations (such as overreactions or apathetic responses). This illustrates that there is a large set of distinct discernable normative attitudes that exist between the extremes of resentment and gratitude. And, because there are plenty of less extreme attitudes that exist in this space, each one of these can correspond with the distinct moral properties between the morally right and the morally wrong. Our ability to respond with and recognize distinct appropriate or inappropriate reactive attitudes to certain situations is evidence that it is not the case that our attitudes are not fine-grained enough to account for a diversity of moral properties. So, our actual normative attitudes are fine-grained enough to account for the wide and diverse range of distinct moral properties.

Of course, one can accept that there is a wide range of distinct normative attitudes, but maintain that these distinct attitudes are not fine-grained *enough*. But, I suspect they can never be fine-grained *enough* to convince an opponent otherwise. It is clear that normal agents do not adopt the same attitude when they are wronged than when they are merely inconvenienced, or when they are kindly gestured towards than when they are given great help and benefit. There being different phenomenal experiences in different normative situations is evidence of that. Take the difference between the phenomenology of ethical deliberation and the phenomenology of moral deliberation. This difference is evidence of distinct normative attitudes. Beliefs about moral issues are not beliefs that tend to leave much room for compromise, whereas beliefs about the ethical more generally do have more leg room. For example, a person may deliberate between becoming a school teacher or an accountant by weighing the pros and cons of each career.

This would be a clear example of ethical deliberation, but is in no obvious way moral. That is because the moral is an instance of the ethical that is uniquely concerned with notions of duty and obligation.<sup>31</sup> Our moral beliefs tend not to budge, while our ethical beliefs more generally often shift and move as we try to arrive at conclusions and produce action through deliberation. Goodness might be paired with an attitude of favoring, betterness with an attitude of favoring-more, rightness with an attitude of obligation, etc. Because we actually adopt attitudes like favoring and favoring-more, our actual normative attitudes do correspond with the diversity of moral properties. The difference in the phenomenology of

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<sup>31</sup> Darwall, Stephen. "Ethics and Morality." In *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett (New York: Routledge), 552-567.



ethical and moral disagreement indicates that we actually adopt different normative attitudes in different normative situations. Therefore, accounting for the diversity of moral properties is not a problem for Dispositional Moral Realism.

## Conclusion

I have argued that certain objections against Dispositional Moral Realism are unsuccessful. Opponents of the view may try to reject it on the grounds that moral properties are neither secondary qualities, nor analogous to them. However, McDowell's analogy is meant only to demonstrate that moral facts and values do not suffer from a strange ontology. Additionally, though moral properties relate to subjects' affective attitudes, they are neither identical nor reducible to those attitudes, so the view is not a kind of Subjectivism. Furthermore, the wide range of our actual normative attitudes means that the view has no problem accounting for the diversity of distinct moral properties. If the view is to be rejected, it should not be for any of the objections considered here. I conclude that the considered arguments against Dispositional Moral Realism are unsuccessful.

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*The reader will have noticed how Singh makes use of technical distinctions. (For example, he draws the distinction between morality and ethics, where often – here in these interstitial passages included – these are used interchangeably.) An especially subtle distinction is that of mind-dependence from subjectivity (see the section entitled "Enoch's criticism"). This allows Singh to differentiate Dispositional Moral Realism from "notoriously tempting but ultimately fallacious schools of moral relativism" (see the Introduction to this volume).*