

Are Moral Qualities Response-dependent?

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Some fifteen years ago, John McDowell suggested that moral realists ought to exploit the analogy between moral qualities and secondary qualities. Rather than think of moral qualities as “brutely there” without any “internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility”, McDowell proposed that moral realists should claim that moral qualities are *dispositions* of a sort—dispositions to elicit merited responses in appropriate agents.¹ In the intervening years, McDowell’s suggestion has been widely discussed and criticized.² My aim in this essay is to consider afresh the claim that moral qualities are secondary qualities—or as I shall call them, “response-dependent qualities”.³ I will argue that some of the more prominent objections to this position are inconclusive, but that there are other good reasons for rejecting it. If the overall argument of this essay is correct, then we shall have further grounds for thinking that the moral realist ought to defend what I will call a “primary” account of moral qualities.

I. Response-dependent Moral Qualities

According to the traditional Lockean view, to say that something is a response-dependent property is to say (roughly) that that thing’s instantiation in an object consists in the disposition of that object to give rise to certain kinds of response in certain types of agent in certain types of circumstance.⁴ Colors, sounds, smells, and tastes are, on the traditional view, paradigmatic examples of response-dependent properties. A response-dependent account of colors, for example, says that something instantiates redness, because, and only because, that thing is disposed to look red to agents like us in suitable conditions. When applied to moral qualities, the response-dependent account tells us that

X instantiates a **moral property** because, and only because, X is disposed to give rise to subjective states E in suitable subjects S in suitable conditions C.

This thesis is what I shall call the “basic claim” of the response-dependent view of moral qualities. It is worth pausing to consider it in more detail.

First, I assume that (at the very least) the basic claim purports to be an *elucidation* of what it is for something to be an instance of a moral property—or as I shall hereafter say, a *moral quality*.⁵ That is, I will assume that (at the very least) the basic claim endeavors to offer us a particularly informative account of the *nature* of moral qualities. Accordingly, if a particular formulation of the basic claim is insufficiently revelatory of the nature of a given moral quality, I will assume that that fact counts against its being an adequate formulation.

Second, I shall assume that the basic claim is not supposed to express a contingent empirical generalization, but is supposed to be necessarily true. In what follows, I will remain agnostic about whether the necessity in question is broadly logical, metaphysical, conceptual, or the like.⁶ I will, furthermore, remain neutral concerning the epistemological question of whether the basic claim is known *a priori* or *a posteriori*.⁷

Third, I assume that the basic claim is compatible with the view that moral qualities are *identical* with dispositions to elicit appropriate responses or *supervene* on such dispositions.⁸ I assume this because both the identity and the supervenience views are consistent with what is essential to the response-dependent position, namely, the explanatory thesis that entities instantiate moral properties *in virtue of*, and only in virtue of, the fact that they give rise to appropriate responses in suitable agents.

Fourth, I assume that the basic claim should be read to say that moral qualities are either identical with, or supervene on, what might be called *Lockean dispositions*. And let’s say that something instantiates a Lockean dispositional property P just in case it has some property Q—or “categorical base”—which has the causal role of generating the appropriate experiences in suitable agents. So, for example, if we assume that *being nauseating* is a Lockean dispositional property, then an object is nauseating if and only if that object has some property P which has the causal role of generating feelings of nausea in suitable agents. It is common for philosophers to identify a Lockean disposition with the second-order property of *having a property which plays a certain causal role*. On this view, the property of *being nauseating* is identical with the property of *having the property of generating nausea in suitable agents*. For simplicity’s sake, I will assume that this account of dispositions is correct, though nothing in my argument will rest upon this assumption.

Fifth, I assume that there are any number of ways in which the response-dependent theorist might understand the basic claim’s references to “subjective states”, “suitable agents” and “suitable circumstances”. The sort of subjective states to which moral qualities give rise, for example, might be

understood as motivational states (i.e., dispositions of the will), moral judgments or emotions of the appropriate kind.⁹ Likewise, one might maintain that suitable subjects are, as Mark Johnston suggests, “reasonable” agents, or perhaps, virtuous agents.¹⁰ Similarly, suitable conditions might be specified as states of “increasing non-evaluative information”,¹¹ or vivid presentation of one or another natural fact. I shall have more to say about the specific sorts of response-dependent views I have in mind later.

Finally, in what follows, I shall presume that the basic claim purports to offer a robustly normative, non-reductionist account of moral qualities. That is to say, I assume that advocates of the view do not wish either to analyze the concept of a moral quality in non-normative, non-evaluative, ‘naturalistic’ terms, or identify moral qualities with non-normative, non-evaluative, naturalistic qualities. In the same spirit, I shall also assume that the response-dependent theorist will not claim that the reference to “suitable” in the locution “suitable subjects” refers to some merely descriptive property such as statistical normality. I am well aware that one might defend a version of the response-dependent view which aspires to be reductionistic; but on this occasion, I will not concern myself with these positions.¹²

II. Competitors and Motivations

Before us, then, is an initial characterization of some of the basic features of the response-dependent position. It is, to be sure, not a position which most theorists in the moral realist tradition have adopted. So, why have theorists such as McDowell and Johnston found this position attractive? And with what other moral realist positions is the response-dependent view supposed to contrast?

Let’s consider the second question. I shall assume that the realist view with which the response-dependent account is supposed to contrast is one which says that moral qualities are “primary” qualities of a sort. Perhaps the best way initially to categorize the primary view of moral qualities is negatively. The primary view denies, on the one hand, that moral qualities are *conceiving-dependent qualities*. That is to say, the primary view denies that moral qualities are “projected” or “imposed” on a thing by virtue of some (non-divine) agent (or agents) having (or being disposed to have) propositional or non-propositional attitudes toward that thing under actual or counterfactual conditions. In this sense, moral properties are different from properties like *being a five dollar bill* or *being a piece of property* which are arguably imposed on entities by the attitudes of agents.¹³ On the other hand, the primary view denies that moral qualities are mere dispositions to elicit attitudes. Thus, the proponent of the primary view denies that moral qualities are a species of response-dependent quality. What the advocate of the primary view of moral qualities maintains, by contrast, is that moral properties are instantiated in actions, intentions, etc., and that their being instantiated in actions, intentions, etc., is not

constituted by our having (or being disposed to have) subjective attitudes or responses to those actions, intentions, etc.

We are now in a better position to see why theorists like McDowell have found the response-dependent position alluring. Here is McDowell in his own words:

(t)o press the analogy (between response-dependent qualities and values) is to stress that evaluative ‘attitudes’, or states of will, are like (say) colour experience in being unintelligible except as modifications of a sensibility like ours. The idea of value experience involves taking admiration, say, to represent its object as having a property which (although there in the object) is essentially subjective in much the same way as the property that an object is represented as having by an experience of redness—that is, understood adequately only in terms of the appropriate modification of human (or similar) sensibility. The disanalogy, now, is that a virtue (say) is conceived to be not merely such as to elicit the appropriate ‘attitude’ ... but rather such as to *merit* it.¹⁴

McDowell’s thought, I judge, is that moral qualities can adequately be conceived of only in terms of the kinds of subjective response that those qualities merit. (An account like J. L. Mackie’s which says that we typically assume that moral qualities are primary qualities badly distorts our ordinary notion of a moral quality.) To grasp the nature of an instance of kindness is to grasp it as a quality which *demand*s, is *worthy of* various sorts of appropriate emotional, desiderative, and actional response. If McDowell is right, the response-dependent view can make sense of this feature of moral qualities; the primary view, by contrast, cannot.

McDowell identifies a second reason for espousing the response-dependent account. Here is McDowell again:

For it seems impossible—at least on reflection—to take seriously the idea of something that is like a primary quality in being simply *there*, independently of human sensibility, but is nevertheless intrinsically (not conditionally on contingencies about human sensibility) such as to elicit some ‘attitude’ or state of will from someone who becomes aware of it.... Shifting to a secondary-quality analogy renders irrelevant any worry about how something that is brutally *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility.¹⁵

Coming to the surface here is McDowell’s conviction that any adequate account of moral qualities must be compatible with the fact that apprehension of those qualities is intrinsically connected with appropriate motivation. Or to put it somewhat differently, coming into view is McDowell’s conviction that any adequate account of moral qualities must fit comfortably with *motivational internalism* of a certain sort. I take it to be clear that the version of motivational internalism that McDowell wishes to defend has two chief components.¹⁶ First, the view says that there is a necessary connection between a

person's accurately apprehending and judging (in a certain way) that something is morally required, wicked, kind, etc., and that person's being motivated to act appropriately.¹⁷ Second, the view maintains that moral judgments by themselves (i.e., without the aid of any desire that is a distinct entity from such judgments) motivate agents to act. Any failure of moral motivation is, on this view, a *cognitive* failure; it is a failure to apprehend moral reality aright. According to McDowell, the primary view of moral qualities cannot plausibly be combined with motivational internalism thus conceived. A response-dependent view, by contrast, fits comfortably with motivational internalism. Not only does a response-dependent account fit comfortably with motivational internalism thus construed, the response-dependent account also offers us an *explanation* of the necessary connection that exists between moral judgment and moral motivation. On the response-dependent view, moral qualities *just are* the sorts of entity which, necessarily, when grasped (in a certain way) elicit appropriate motivational states in moral agents.

There is, however, a third motivation for espousing a response-dependent view which has been articulated by Mark Johnston.¹⁸ Johnston points out that the response-dependent view can preserve some of the deepest intuitions in the broadly Pragmatist tradition. More specifically, the response-dependent view can preserve the conviction that practically important features of reality cannot in principle outstrip our grasp of them.¹⁹ Since moral qualities are dispositions to elicit subjective responses in appropriate agents, it is impossible for something to be a moral quality and be such that it cannot be apprehended by appropriate agents. Moral qualities are *for us* insofar as they *existentially depend* on our subjective responses.²⁰ So, moral values are not, as J. L. Mackie believed, queer Platonic entities hovering somewhere in a Platonic heaven, and in principle inaccessible to us. Rather, instances of moral values such as wickedness, kindness, and benevolence are not intelligible apart from, and existentially depend on the sorts of sensibilities that we (and beings like us) have in suitable conditions. The response-dependent view, we might say, avoids an "alienated" account of moral value by *domesticating* value.

III. The Phenomenological Argument

To this point, I have primarily tried to articulate some of the fundamental motivations for the response-dependent view. I now wish to consider several variants of one type of objection to the view—what I will call the "phenomenological objection" to the response-dependent position. I shall maintain that this type of objection, though suggestive, does not decisively rebut the response-dependent position. I will then, in the next section, raise several different objections which, when conjoined with the phenomenological objection, should convince the realist to reject the response-dependent position.

The first variant of the phenomenological objection runs as follows.²¹ The response-dependent view tells us that, necessarily, moral qualities are identi-

cal with dispositions to give rise to certain kinds of subjective experience. The types of experience to which moral qualities give rise partially constitute the nature of those qualities. But it is plausible to believe that, if it is necessarily the case that moral qualities are identical with dispositions, then that fact would figure in our experience of moral qualities. Our experience of apprehending one or another moral quality, however, is not that of apprehending a disposition of the sort envisaged by response-dependent theorists. Our experience of apprehending the wrongness of Brenda's betrayal of Bob, for instance, is not that of apprehending a *disposition* of Brenda's action to elicit certain kinds of subjective experience. That is, we don't apprehend the moral quality in question *as* a disposition to give rise to certain sorts of subjective experience; the content of our apprehension makes no reference to how suitable subjects would respond to it. To the contrary, the wrongness of Brenda's betrayal looks to be a monadic, non-relational quality of her action. It follows from this that we have good reason to believe that moral qualities are not response-dependent qualities.

There are several replies to this argument. Colin McGinn has recently suggested that the response-dependent theorist can avoid the force of this argument altogether if she rejects a version of the position which says that moral qualities are identical with dispositions in favor of a view which says that moral qualities *supervene* on dispositions.²² In doing so, says McGinn, the response-dependent theorist can say that the wrongness of Brenda's action is an "emergent", monadic quality which is *grounded* in a disposition, and thus preserve the phenomenology of moral experience.

In what follows, I will have something more to say about the appeal to supervenience when defending the response-dependent view. For now, I wish to gesture towards a more economical reply to the argument. The more economical reply is to reject the assumption that since moral qualities are necessarily identical with dispositions we should expect that fact to figure in our ordinary moral experience. This type of reply is particularly attractive if the response-dependent theorist maintains that it is an *a posteriori* necessary truth that moral qualities are identical with dispositions. After all, we are by now familiar with cases in which it is very plausible to think that a similar sort of identity relation obtains (e.g., water, heat, etc.), even though our ordinary experience suggests nothing of the sort.²³ So, the mere fact that experience of moral qualities does not reveal their nature can hardly be thought to militate against the response-dependent position in particular.

Let me now turn to a second version of the phenomenological argument recently articulated by Robert Pargetter. According to Pargetter,

...there is one intuition which, if it is considered important, will be a major problem for the account, for it is incompatible with this dispositional model of goodness. This is the intuition that we directly perceive, or have a direct acquaintance with or an awareness of, moral properties. Accordingly on such a view 'good'

denotes a property of an action which is *directly presented* to us in some kind of mental or perceptual experience....Goodness is experienced in a direct fashion, and this is incompatible with goodness being like a dispositional property. We apprehend goodness, but not fragility. Goodness must itself be causally efficacious if it is to be directly apprehended.²⁴

The argument can be formulated as a *reductio* of the response-dependent view of moral qualities. It says that

1. We can have direct acquaintance with moral qualities (asmp).
2. A person can have direct acquaintance with a (non-abstract) entity only if that entity is itself causally responsible for that acquaintance (asmp).
3. Dispositional qualities cannot be causes (asmp).
4. Moral qualities are dispositional qualities (asmp).
5. Moral qualities cannot be causes (from 2, 3, 4).
6. So, we cannot have direct acquaintance with moral qualities (from 2, 5).
7. So, we can, and cannot have, direct acquaintance with moral qualities (from 1, 6).
8. So, moral qualities are not dispositional qualities (4–7, RAA).

The argument hinges on our having a clear enough sense of what it is to be “directly acquainted” with a quality. Unfortunately, Pargetter says very little concerning how we ought to understand what it is to directly apprehend a thing. Nor has the philosophical tradition spoken with one voice on the matter. So, perhaps the best we can do is to say something briefly by way of clarification here.²⁵

I assume that when Pargetter uses the term “acquaintance” he means to pick out a mode of being aware of entities which is not a *by-way-of* awareness. So, I presume that, at the very least, Pargetter means to say that our awareness of moral qualities is not exclusively what might be called *conceptual apprehension*. That is, in grasping moral qualities, we are not doing so merely by way of the use of some definite description such as *that property that Moore compared to yellow*. Nor is our mode of apprehension what might be called *nominative apprehension*. Our apprehension of moral qualities is not—if at all—that of grasping moral qualities by way of the use of some (proper) name such as “Aristotle”. Rather, in claiming that moral qualities can be directly apprehended, I assume that Pargetter means to say that moral qualities can be *present* to us in some sort of “mental or perceptual experience.”²⁶ Direct acquaintance is, we might say, *presentational apprehension*. Here, though, we can distinguish between various modes of acquaintance. One mode of direct acquaintance is what we can call *perceptual acquaintance*. Perceptual acquaintance with an entity consists in that entity’s being present to an agent in some perceptual experience; I am perceptually acquainted

with the squareness of the table insofar as that squareness is present to me in perceptual experience. Another brand of acquaintance is what can be termed *intellective acquaintance*. Intellective acquaintance with an entity consists in that entity's being present to an agent by intellection or "intellectual intuition"; I can be intellectually acquainted with the dimensions of the table via a mathematical calculation. To these we could add yet others—*recollective acquaintance* (e.g., recalling some piece of information) and *introspective acquaintance* (i.e., being aware of one's own conscious experience), to name two.

It will be noticed, however, that Pargetter's argument does not merely claim that we can have acquaintance with moral qualities; it specifies that we can have *direct* acquaintance with moral qualities. By specifying that we can have direct acquaintance with moral qualities, Pargetter apparently means to say that our acquaintance with moral qualities can be non-inferential in character.²⁷ In some cases, at least, our apprehension of moral qualities is not arrived at by inferring their presence from our awareness of non-moral qualities, or from some general moral principle. Rather, in some cases of acquaintance with moral qualities, our apprehension of moral qualities is akin to the manner in which we ordinarily perceive external objects such as trees, mountains, and the like: we apprehend them in an immediate, non-inferential act of cognition.

Clearly there is more to be said here. But even with this brief treatment of direct acquaintance, we can pick out at least two ways of responding to Pargetter's argument. One line of response is to reject premise (1) of the argument—or the claim that we can have direct acquaintance with moral qualities. In taking this route, the response-dependent theorist concedes that Pargetter is right; we cannot have direct acquaintance (perceptual or otherwise) with dispositions. *Powers* are never present to us; at most their *manifestations* are. But rejecting (1) may be a rather small concession on the part of the response-dependent theorist. For suppose we make the plausible assumption that the primary bearers of moral properties are character traits, and mental entities such as intentions, desires and beliefs. And suppose we also assume that actions have moral properties in a derivative sense only insofar as they express morally appropriate or inappropriate character traits, intentions, beliefs, etc. If this view is right, then it should not be particularly surprising that we don't have acquaintance with moral qualities.²⁸ We wouldn't ordinarily say that, in a wide range of cases, the intentions of others, and the properties of these intentions are present to us. At most, it would seem that the *signs* of these intentions and their properties are. For example, we wouldn't ordinarily say that a child's intention to be playful is present to us; at most, the behavior of the child that expresses this intention is. Similarly, we wouldn't say that a person's intention to be kind is present to us; at most the behavior that expresses this intention is. If this is right, then it's plausible to believe that our grasp of moral qualities is a species of what I earlier called "conceptual apprehension". We grasp qualities such as an intention's kindness by way of the use of an "expressive particular concept"

such as *the kindness of which this behavior is an expression*. Of course this view doesn't entail that our apprehension of moral qualities is inferential. Just as a person with the relevant conceptual expertise may immediately "see" that a child intends to be playful, so also may the person with the relevant moral expertise immediately "see" that a person intends to be kind.

There is, however, another avenue of response to Pargetter's argument, and that is to reject premise (3). To be sure, the claim that dispositions cannot be causes is widely accepted by philosophers. But I think that the arguments that have been offered in favor of the claim are less than decisive. Frank Jackson, for instance, maintains that there are two main reasons for thinking that dispositions cannot be causes.²⁹ First, to allow that dispositions can be causes is to allow for spurious cases of causal overdetermination. For suppose we assume—as we in fact already have—that it is the categorical base of a given disposition which causes a certain effect. And suppose that we also assume that the disposition in question itself causally brings about that very same effect. If we do so, then we shall have engaged in a case of dubious "double-counting" according to which categorical bases and their dispositions causally overdetermine their effects. Second, to allow that a disposition itself, as opposed to its categorical base, causes a given effect is to deny Hume's thesis that causal connections are contingent. For presumably if dispositions are causes, then they have their causal powers essentially; it is essential to a disposition that it is likely to have certain effects in certain favorable circumstances. It follows from this, however, that there is a conceptually or logically necessary connection between causes and their effects. This supposition, however, is a flat denial of Hume's thesis that there are no conceptually or logically necessary connections between "matters of fact".

Both arguments are problematic. The first argument tacitly assumes that if a categorical base of a given disposition causes a given effect, then it (in addition to other circumstantial factors) is a sufficient cause of that effect. But the response-dependent theorist need not assume that. Instead, she can claim that both the categorical base of a disposition and the disposition itself are partial causes of a given effect. After all, cases in which two entities partially cause a given effect are common enough. We should be no more troubled by the fact that both a particular categorical base and a disposition partially cause a given effect than we are by the fact that both flying debris and a strong wind together destroy an unfortunately placed house.

The plausibility of the second argument plays on an ambiguity intrinsic to Hume's thesis. Interpreted in one fashion, Hume's thesis says that for any singular causal relation in which A causes B, it is a contingent fact that A causes B. According to those who defend Hume's thesis, the relation is contingent because we can imagine everything else remaining the same and A's not having caused B. But the claim that dispositions are causes is not in conflict with this interpretation of Hume's thesis. The response-dependence theorist can concede that it is conceptually possible for a given disposition not to have the

effects it did in a particular circumstance. We can imagine, for instance, a vase having the disposition of being fragile, and yet its not breaking when dropped on a particular occasion. Understood in a second fashion, Hume's thesis says that it cannot be essential to a given quality that it is disposed to have certain causal effects. Clearly enough, the claim that dispositions are causes is in conflict with this second interpretation of Hume's thesis. But this second interpretation of Hume's thesis is arguably not what Hume himself had in mind; nor is it supported by any of the thought experiments used to argue for the truth of the first interpretation of Hume's thesis. Moreover, this second interpretation of Hume's thesis is highly controversial. As Tim Crane points out, many philosophers have been attracted to causal/nomic theories of qualities according to which qualities themselves have (or are) causal powers.³⁰ But if this second interpretation of Hume's thesis is correct, it would establish in a stroke that these theories are false.

So far we have considered two versions of the phenomenological objection. Now let me introduce yet a third strain of the objection. This third strain of the objection appeals to a significant disanalogy between the phenomenology of apprehending paradigmatic examples of response-dependent qualities and apprehending moral qualities.³¹ Consider, for example, the phenomenology of apprehending an instance of a paradigmatic response-dependent property such as *being nauseating*. When we reflect upon the phenomenology of the nauseating, we are not encouraged to believe that if we lost our capacity to feel nausea when presented with, say, a piece of rotten meat, we would have thereby lost our access to a way that meat is independently of its being disposed to cause us to feel nausea. Upon reflection, we aren't so much as tempted to think this. Rather, reflection on the phenomenology of the nauseating strongly suggests that the nauseating *just is* the power to cause feelings of nausea in creatures like us. But the case of the ethical is different. The phenomenology of apprehending moral qualities does *not* clearly suggest that moral qualities are just powers to elicit appropriate responses in practically rational or virtuous agents. This is evidenced by the fact that those with deeply realist intuitions at least *are* tempted to think that if otherwise practically rational agents lost their ability to form appropriate moral judgments, they would have thereby lost access to a way the world is independently of its being disposed to elicit those judgments. Moral qualities seem independent of our subjective attitudes in a way not evidenced by instances of response-dependent properties such as the nauseating. Thus, the disanalogy.

Two strategies of reply suggest themselves. First, one might agree that the proponent of the argument is correct to maintain that moral qualities are independent (in the sense specified above) of the responses of virtuous or practically rational agents. One might further point out, however, that the concept of a response-dependent quality is flexible enough to account for that fact. The most obvious way to account for the requisite independence is to think of moral qualities as dispositions to elicit the appropriate responses in *ideal agents* in

ideal conditions. So, for instance, we might say that moral qualities are those qualities which elicit appropriate motivations in agents who exhibit all the relevant cognitive excellences and no relevant cognitive defects in ideal epistemic conditions. In any event, if this move is made, it looks as if we can preserve the requisite independence of moral qualities; we are not nearly so inclined to think that moral qualities are independent of the attitudes of ideal agents. Moreover, on an idealized view, if otherwise practically rational agents were to lose their capacity to make moral judgments, it *would* follow that these agents were thereby losing access to a way the world is independently of its being such as to elicit certain kinds of responses in them.

A second line of response to the present objection denies a central contention of the argument, namely, that moral qualities enjoy the sort of independence from our responses which the objection claims. The advocate of this response does not deny that moral qualities *seem* to have this sort of independence; she simply claims that things are not as they appear. In support of the plausibility of her claim, the advocate of this response points to response-dependent properties such as colors. Though it seems (to many at least) that instances of the colors are existentially independent of our responses, we have good independent evidence that they are not. Similarly with moral qualities. Though it seems that moral qualities have the requisite sort of independence, the arguments offered by McDowell and others give us sufficient grounds for thinking they are not.³²

I believe that these are the two most obvious responses to the third variant of the phenomenological argument. Let me close this section by suggesting that these responses to the third variant of the objection are, for various reasons, unsatisfying and, hence, that the force of the third version of the objection is not completely blunted.

We have seen that one of the great attractions of the response-dependent view is that it purports to explain a robust form of motivational internalism. The response-dependent view is not merely supposed to offer us a version of moral realism that is compatible with motivational internalism; it is supposed to offer us an account of *why* there is such a close connection between the judgments of the virtuous agent and her moral motivations. Notice, however, that if we adopt the first reply to the third variant of the phenomenological argument, we surrender this putative explanatory advantage.³³ What the idealized view does is offer us a position that explains why there is a necessary connection between the judgments and motivations of an *idealized* agent. However, to offer an explanation of why there is a necessary connection between the moral judgments and moral motivations of an idealized agent is not perforce to offer an explanation of why there is a necessary connection between the judgments and motivations of the ordinary virtuous agent. Ordinary virtuous agents are not, after all, idealized agents in ideal conditions. An implication of adopting the idealized response-dependent view, then, is that no light is shed on why there should be a necessary connection between the judg-

ments and motivations of the ordinary virtuous person, or what the nature of that necessary connection is.³⁴

The second response to the third variant of the phenomenological argument comes at a cost as well. The second response, it will be remembered, concedes that our moral experience (or at least reflection on our moral experience) suggests that moral qualities are independent of our responses in the requisite sense. It denies, however, that the appearances should be trusted. But suppose we accept the plausible principle that, all other things being equal, if the phenomenology of our experience of X (or reflection on the phenomenology of our experience of X) strongly suggests that X is F, then we ought to believe that X is F.³⁵ If we accept this principle, then the second reply will go through only if we have good reasons for thinking that when it comes to the phenomenology of moral qualities, all other things are *not* equal. So, the advocate of the second response must furnish good independent reasons for thinking that moral qualities are response-dependent qualities. Against the second response, I shall now argue that these good independent reasons are not forthcoming.

IV. Undermining the Motivations

I have been contending that though the phenomenological objection does not by itself offer us decisive reasons for rejecting the response-dependent position, it might very well play an important part in a case for rejecting the view. My purpose in this section is to show that the three arguments in favor of the response-dependent position which we considered earlier are not convincing. If the arguments offered in this section are correct, then we are entitled to two conclusions. First, we are entitled to conclude that we lack a sufficient rationale for adopting the response-dependent view. Second, we are entitled to conclude that, if the third version of the phenomenological objection is correct, we have *prima facie* reasons for rejecting the response-dependent position.

Let's begin with McDowell's first argument in favor of the response-dependent view. McDowell, it will be recalled, maintains that, on the primary view, moral qualities are similar to instances of squareness, solidity, and the like insofar as their nature can be adequately characterized, and hence, understood, independent of any reference to human sensibilities or responses (or sensibilities sufficiently like ours).³⁶ But to claim this, says McDowell, is to deny a truism about moral qualities, viz., that moral qualities can only adequately be conceived of in terms of the kinds of subjective response that those qualities *merit*. The response-dependent view can honor this truism; on the response-dependent view, moral qualities just are (or supervene on) dispositions to elicit the appropriate sorts of merited response. Thus, the primary view should be rejected in favor of the response-dependent view.

The argument is not persuasive. The argument is not persuasive because it glosses over a distinction between two different varieties of the primary view.

What we can call “strong” primary views maintain that moral qualities are such that their nature can be adequately characterized and, hence, understood, independent of any reference to the subjective responses of creatures like us. According to strong primary views, moral qualities are akin to cases of squareness, solidity, and the like. “Weak” primary views, by contrast, claim that moral qualities are such that their nature must be characterized and, hence, understood, in terms of the sorts of subjective response that are appropriate to them by creatures like us. To understand adequately what it is for something to be, say, kind is to grasp the sorts of response that are appropriate to it. On the weak view, however, an instance of kindness is not *constituted* by the sorts of response to which it gives rise in appropriate agents. Rather, a kind action is disposed to give rise to proper responses in appropriate agents *because* it is kind; it is not kind in virtue of giving rise to those responses.

McDowell’s first argument assumes that the defender of the primary view must adopt a strong version of the position. But the advocate of the primary view need not adopt a strong version of the position. She can, and indeed she *should*, adopt a weak version of the view. As I’ve indicated, the advocate of the weak version of the position admits that moral qualities must be adequately *conceived* of in terms of the sorts of response they merit. But this admission should not tempt us to think that the response-dependent theory is true. To argue that because we must conceive of moral qualities in terms of the responses they merit, moral qualities are thereby constituted by the responses they merit, would be to fall into confusion; it would be, to use Thomistic jargon, to confuse the order of understanding with the order of being. Granted, in distinguishing between strong and weak versions of the primary view we are not following certain ways of making the primary/secondary distinction which leave no room for weak primary views (e.g., McDowell’s). But that only suggests that those ways of making the primary/secondary distinction are inadequate insofar as they ignore interesting variants of the primary view.

Now take McDowell’s second rationale for rejecting the primary view in favor of the response-dependent one. The argument in this case is that any adequate account of moral qualities must fit comfortably with a certain species of motivational internalism. More specifically, the claim is that any adequate account of moral qualities must fit comfortably with the view which says that (i) there is a necessary connection between an agent’s judging (in a certain way) that something is required, good, kind, etc., and that agent’s being appropriately motivated, and (ii) that agent’s moral judgment being such that it motivates that agent by itself (i.e. without the aid of an independent desire). Primary views, however, cannot plausibly be combined with motivational internalism of this sort. Hence, they should be rejected. Response-dependent views, by contrast, not only fit comfortably with motivational internalism thus understood, they also offer an explanation of the intrinsic connection between moral judgment and moral motivation.

It should be evident that the present argument is persuasive only if it really is true that any adequate account of moral qualities must be compatible with motivational internalism thus construed, and primary views cannot plausibly be combined with motivational internalism of this sort. I think that both assumptions are false. However, I do not have the space here to engage in a full-scale polemic against motivational internalism.³⁷ So, I will concentrate on the second assumption. I shall argue that the primary view can nicely accommodate a robust version of motivational internalism like McDowell's.

McDowell claims, following Mackie, that any adequate account of moral qualities must account for the intrinsic connection between moral qualities and the will. That is, any adequate account of moral qualities must account for the fact that moral qualities are such that, necessarily, when an agent of the appropriate sort judges that a given moral quality is instantiated, that judgment itself elicits the proper motivation in that agent. Notice, however, that what motivational internalists like McDowell fundamentally wish to claim is that there is a necessary connection between moral *judgments* (of a certain sort) or the *apprehension* of moral qualities and the will, and not *moral qualities themselves* and motivations. (Moral qualities by themselves do not motivate agents; it is the appropriate sort of cognitive grip on moral qualities that motivates agents.) But if the necessary connection is between moral judgment and motivation, then there is nothing in principle about the primary view that rules out the possibility of its being plausibly combined with motivational internalism of the sort we have described. What the advocate of the primary view can claim is that properly functioning persons in the appropriate environment are so constituted that, necessarily, upon judging (in a certain way) that something is morally required, those persons are motivated in the appropriate fashion, and it is those judgments themselves which do the motivating work. What explains the intimate connection between moral judgment and motivation on this account is not some special features of moral qualities; rather, it is intrinsic features of motivational systems like ours. Of course one could tell a more elaborate story about those features of our motivational system which guarantee the necessary connection between moral judgment and motivation. I will not on this occasion attempt to do this. I will simply register my conviction that there is nothing about a view which locates the explanation of the intimate connection between moral judgment and motivation in our constitution rather than moral qualities themselves which renders that view any less luminous or interesting.

I turn now to the last argument in favor of the response-dependent view. Recall that the last argument in favor of the response-dependent view says that practically important features of reality must be in principle the sorts of thing that are accessible to human persons. Since the primary view says that moral qualities are existentially independent of human "sensibilities", it cannot guarantee that moral qualities are accessible to human persons. However, on the response-dependent view, moral qualities are existentially dependent on the sensibilities of human agents. Hence, they are in principle accessible to human

agents. Consequently, the response-dependent view is to be favored over the primary view.

I think that this argument can be dispensed with rather quickly since it does not (so far as I can tell) give us any reasons for thinking that the response-dependent view is true. Reality may be such that some important practical truths are inaccessible to us. That would be unfortunate, of course. But I know of no argument that should convince us that what is unfortunate is not actual.³⁸

V. A Final Objection

If the argument of the last section is correct, the reasons which have been offered in support of the response-dependent view fall short of their mark. I have claimed that this fact is of significance. Not only does the position appear to lack a sufficient rationale, the response-dependent theorist can also turn back the third variant of the phenomenological objection only if she can supply good independent reasons for thinking that the response-dependent position is true. I have argued that these reasons are not forthcoming. If my argument is correct, we are led to the conclusion that there are *prima facie* grounds for rejecting the response-dependent view.

This last section endeavors to move the overall argument forward another step by presenting a final objection to the response-dependent view. The final objection takes the form of a dilemma. It says that either the response-dependent theorist defends a general theory of value according to which all moral qualities are response-dependent, or she does not. If she chooses the former option, then the response-dependent view cannot plausibly be made out. This is because there are some moral qualities which stubbornly resist being characterized as response-dependent qualities. If the response-dependent theorist chooses the latter option, then her view suffers from a certain kind of ungainliness. The response-dependent theorist is forced to posit moral qualities of two kinds: those which are response-dependent and those which are not. The primary theorist, by contrast, need posit only moral values of one sort—viz., primary value. So, either way we choose, the response-dependent theorist is faced with an uncomfortable conclusion with which the advocate of the primary view is not.

Response-dependent theorists like Johnston appear to grasp the first horn of the dilemma; their claim appears to be that all moral qualities are response-dependent.³⁹ Let's suppose for the moment that this "seamless" account of value is correct. Now consider a given moral property—say, that of sound practical reason. And let's think of the property of sound practical reason as a dispositional capacity of a sort: a person exhibits sound practical reason only if, necessarily, that person reliably responds in the morally appropriate ways to various morally relevant situations, persons, actions, etc.⁴⁰ Presumably, the response-dependent theorist who is a non-reductionist about value will admit that there is such a property as having sound practical reason which is instantiated by various agents, and that this property (and its instances) cannot be

reduced to some non-normative or non-evaluative properties (or property instances). Indeed, it is arguable that the response-dependent theorist is committed to there being such a value by virtue of her defense of the basic claim. For consider the fact that when the response-dependent theorist spells out the basic claim, she will have to offer us an account of what a “suitable subject” is. A suitable subject, however, is very plausibly thought of as an agent who exhibits sound practical reason; she is the sort of agent who responds appropriately to a wide range of morally relevant situations, events, persons, etc.⁴¹ If that is right, however, then a commitment to there being a property of sound practical reason which is instantiated by agents is implied by the basic claim together with the further supposition that some agents do in fact (non-accidentally) exhibit the proper sorts of response in the appropriate situations. In any event, if we maintain that sound practical reason is a response-dependent property, then we shall need to formulate an elucidation of what it is for something to be an instance of sound practical reason. As an initial try, we might say,

(SPR) X instantiates **sound practical reason** because, and only because, X is disposed to elicit certain kinds of response (e.g., responses of approbation, etc.) in agents who instantiate sound practical reason in suitable conditions.

Earlier we noticed that a claim such as (SPR) can be read in either of two ways. On the one hand, (SPR) can be read in a “token-identity” fashion; instances of sound practical reason are *identical* with dispositions to elicit subjective responses of a certain kind in suitable agents. On the other hand, (SPR) can be read to say that instances of sound practical reason *supervene* on dispositions to elicit subjective responses of a certain kind in suitable agents. Let me now indicate why (SPR) encounters serious difficulties on either interpretation.

Consider the interpretation of (SPR) which says that something’s being an instance of sound practical reason supervenes, and thus, existentially depends on its being so as to elicit appropriate responses in agents who instantiate sound practical reason. This interpretation is clearly unattractive because it maintains that, for any instance of sound practical reason referred to on the left hand side of (SPR), that instance of sound practical reason existentially depends on, and is determined by, the qualities referred to on the right hand side of (SPR). But among the qualities referred to on the right hand side of (SPR) are all the instances of sound practical reason exhibited by practically rational agents. However, this leaves open the possibility that, for any particular instance of sound practical reason referred to on the left side of (SPR), that instance of sound practical reason is identical with any particular instance of sound practical reason referred to on the right hand side of the biconditional. For instance: suppose that “X” refers to Aristotle and, thus, the left hand side of (SPR) refers to Aristotle’s practical reason. Presumably, however, since Aristotle instanti-

ates sound practical reason, he will be among the practically reasonable agents referred to on the right hand side of (SPR). But this implies that Aristotle's sound practical reason is referred to on both the left and right hand side of (SPR). And, given that (SPR) is supposed to be read as a supervenience claim, this implies that Aristotle's sound practical reason existentially depends on itself. But that, clearly enough, is not coherent. Qualities cannot existentially depend on themselves. Existential dependence is an asymmetrical relation that holds between *different* qualities.

This objection can be entirely avoided, however, if we interpret (SPR) to say that a thing's being an instance of sound practical reason is identical with its being a disposition to elicit appropriate responses in agents who instantiate sound practical reason. For in this case, there is no claim that a thing's being an instance of sound practical reason supervenes on the sorts of response it elicits in certain kinds of agent. Of course this reading of (SPR) does not absolve (SPR) from being circular; we still have a reference to sound practical reason on both sides of our biconditional. But the mere fact that (SPR) exhibits circularity is not sufficient for dismissing it as an inadequate elucidation of the quality of sound practical reason; we know that some circular elucidations are informative. And the present interpretation of (SPR) *is* informative. Among other things, it offers us information about the sorts of relations that instances of sound practical reason bear to agents who exhibit sound practical reason. Nevertheless, we should not accept the present elucidation of (SPR) as it stands. Although the present interpretation of (SPR) is not vacuous, it offers us the *wrong* sort of account of sound practical reason.

To see the point, compare the present interpretation of (SPR) with the elucidations that are offered of other paradigmatic response-dependent properties. Take the property of *being nauseating*, for example. A plausible elucidation of the nauseating is the following:

X is **nauseating** because, and only because, X is disposed to give rise to sensations of nausea in agents like us in appropriate circumstances.

This elucidation of the nauseating clearly gives us insight into the very nature of the property: instantiations of the nauseating are powers to produce feelings of nausea in creatures like us. Assuming that a person has the concept of feeling nauseous, the present elucidation tells us (for ordinary purposes at least) all we could want about what the nauseating is.

Or, to take a more controversial example, consider the property of being red. A plausible, if rough-hewn, dispositional account of redness runs as such:

X is **red** because, and only because, X is disposed to appear red to agents like us in appropriate situations.

Once again, the present elucidation offers us insight into the very nature of redness: instantiations of redness are powers to produce certain kinds of visual sensation in agents like us. Assuming that a person has the concept of what it

is for something to appear red, the present elucidation tells us (for ordinary purposes at least) what an instance of redness most fundamentally is.

(SPR), however, is different. Far from offering us an account of what sound practical reason most fundamentally is, it gives us the wrong account of the nature of sound practical reason. What (SPR) tells us is that sound practical reason is a power to produce various kinds of response in appropriate agents. But sound practical reason is not most fundamentally a power to produce subjective responses in agents; things do not exhibit sound practical reason because, and only because, they elicit appropriate responses from persons. Rather, an agent's sound practical reason is most fundamentally a capacity of that agent *to respond* appropriately to things. So, rather than put the emphasis on the fact that an agent's sound practical reason is a *capacity to respond* to things, (SPR) puts the emphasis on the fact that an agent's sound practical reason *gives rise to certain responses*. Indeed, (SPR) tells us nothing about the fact that sound practical reason is a capacity for responding appropriately to instances of value and disvalue in the world. And that, I suggest, is sufficient to establish that (SPR) is not an adequate elucidation of sound practical reason. An adequate elucidation of sound practical reason would have to give us insight into what an instance of the property most fundamentally is.

The point here is a general one. There seem to be moral qualities of certain kinds—specifically, moral virtues—that are not happily characterized in response-dependent terms. These qualities are values not because, and only because, they elicit certain kinds of response, but because they are capacities to respond appropriately to the world. Notice, moreover, that the primary theorist has no comparable difficulty in offering an account of what sound practical reason and other virtues most fundamentally are; she can comfortably claim that such qualities are most fundamentally capacities to respond appropriately to instances of morally relevant value and disvalue in the world. The primary theorist will not, of course, deny that instances of sound practical reason give rise to appropriate responses in agents who exhibit sound practical reason. But she will offer a different explanation of why they elicit these responses. On the primary account, instances of sound practical reason are capacities of agents to respond appropriately to reality. As such, they merit our approbation. Accordingly, these qualities give rise to responses of approbation because practically reasonable agents discern that they deserve these responses.

I have argued that the response-dependent theorist cannot comfortably maintain that all moral qualities are response-dependent. If that is true, then the response-dependent theorist might attempt to grasp the second horn of the dilemma. The second horn of the dilemma, recall, offers us a bifurcated account of moral value. The moral qualities which we find in the world come in two kinds: those which are response-dependent and those which are not. While some moral qualities are response-dependent (e.g., instances of moral requirements, etc.), others (e.g., the virtues) are not.

There are two problems with this route. One problem is that the sorts of argument offered by response-dependent theorists in favor of their position

should lead us to believe that all moral qualities are response-dependent. So, for example, if McDowell is right to say that only the response-dependent view can make sense of the claim that values must be understood as those things which merit a range of subjective responses in agents, then sound practical reason's being a moral value implies that it too is a response-dependent property. Or consider McDowell's second argument. McDowell claims that moral qualities have an intrinsic connection to the will; the virtuous agent who grasps them in the right fashion is necessarily motivated upon grasping them in that fashion. Presumably, however, insofar as instances of practical reason are moral qualities, they also merit various kinds of response. Among these responses will be appropriate motivations of various sorts—for instance, motivations to appreciate, respect, honor, etc., instances of sound practical reason. And, presumably, the virtuous person who clearly grasps that something is an instance of sound practical reason will be moved—and necessarily so—to have these appropriate kinds of response. However, if that is correct, then McDowell's argument from motivational internalism should result in the conclusion that instances of sound practical reason also have an intrinsic connection with the will, and are thus response-dependent qualities. And if that is right, there is no room for a view which says that some moral qualities are response-dependent while others are not.

But there is a more fundamental difficulty with this second route: if the response-dependent theorist opts for a bifurcated account of moral value, then her theory becomes needlessly complex. For, once again, what the response-dependent theorist must claim is that there are two kinds of moral value: response-dependent and non-response-dependent. The advocate of the primary view, by contrast, maintains that there is only one kind of moral value: primary value. So, the primary view enjoys the advantage of having a more unified, streamlined account of moral value. More importantly, however, we have seen that the sorts of argument offered in support of the response-dependent view fall short; there is nothing about the "subject-involving" nature of moral qualities or the motivational efficacy of moral judgments for which the primary view cannot account. But now it looks as if the primary view is not only more streamlined than the response-dependent view, it also appears that saying that some moral qualities are response-dependent values is superfluous. The primary view can account for all the putative advantages of the response-dependent view—and more. In this case, Ockham's Razor finds judicious use in the service of the primary view.

VI. Conclusion

I have contended that we ought to reject the response-dependent account of moral qualities. Though the thrust of my argument has primarily been to expose problems with a (non-reductionist) response-dependent account of moral qualities, its underlying aim is a positive one: I wish to show that moral realists have good grounds for accepting a primary view of moral qualities.

Of course I don't take myself to have established that the primary view ought to be accepted by moral realists. It would take further argument to establish that conceiving-dependent accounts of moral qualities are also flawed. At best, what has been established is that the options for moral realists have been narrowed.⁴²

Notes

¹Cf. McDowell (1985), p. 120. McDowell himself always speaks of moral qualities as being *analogous* to secondary-qualities, and not being a species thereof. He has, however, been widely interpreted as claiming that moral qualities are dispositions to elicit subjective responses in agents. (Cf., for example, Dancy (1988) and (1993), Little (1994), Pargetter (1988) and Wright (1988)). To my knowledge, McDowell has not disputed this interpretation; so, I shall avail myself of it. If this interpretation of McDowell's view is incorrect, then we shall have to say that the present essay considers a position widely attributed to McDowell, and which philosophers have found interesting in its own right.

²Advocates of the view include Johnston (1989) and Mulligan (1998)—and more tepidly, Dancy (1993). The view is criticized by Smith (1993), Blackburn (1993), Wright (1988), Pargetter (1988), McGinn (1983) and (1997), and Dancy (1986). I should note that Mark Johnston (in Johnston (1989)) claims to explicate and defend a response-dependent account of moral *concepts*. But he has been interpreted (apparently with his approval) as explicating and defending a response-dependent view of moral *qualities* (cf. McGinn (1997)).

³I borrow the terminology from Johnston (1998).

⁴I say "roughly" because there are various nuances about the concept of a disposition which the present formulation ignores. Cf., for example, Johnston (1992) and (1993). Let me also note that, unless the context indicates otherwise, I will hereafter use the term "disposition" to denote an *instance* of a disposition.

⁵From time to time, I will speak of response-dependent *properties* and not response-dependent qualities. But I shall simply mean by this properties whose instances are response-dependent qualities. Incidentally, I will not assume that the response-dependent theorist claims that moral properties themselves (e.g., kindness, goodness, etc.) or general moral norms (e.g., *that wickedness ought to be despised*, etc.) are dispositions. I will not assume this because these sorts of entities are plausibly viewed as abstract entities, or sets of property instances. However, I take it to be sufficiently obvious that neither abstract entities nor sets are plausibly viewed as being dispositions.

⁶It has become popular among philosophers to claim that the basic claim is necessarily true simply by virtue of the fact that the moral terms used therein rigidly designate dispositions to produce certain kinds of response in certain agents in certain circumstances at the actual world. (Cf. Wiggins (1987), and Hookway (1986), for example.) Though my own conviction is that such an approach is open to decisive objections, I shall assume, for present purposes, that this represents one sense in which the basic claim might be necessary.

⁷The point is discussed in Johnston (1998) and Miscevic (1998).

⁸For the record, I will understand supervenience to be a relation that obtains between instantiations of properties of a kind A and instantiations of properties of a kind B. Roughly put, if A qualities supervene on B qualities, then, necessarily, if anything instantiates a B property, then it instantiates an A property; and, necessarily, if a thing changes in its B quality, then it changes in its A quality. In addition to this "covariance thesis", I shall assume that A qualities existentially *depend* on B qualities, and that B qualities *determine* A qualities. I will also assume that this dependence relation is asymmetrical. If a given A quality depends on a given B quality, then that B quality does not depend on that A quality.

⁹McDowell spells out the basic claim in terms of motivational states; Johnston (1993) and (1989) and McGinn (1996) spell it out in terms of judgments, while Mulligan (1998) spells it out in terms of emotions.

¹⁰Cf. Johnston (1989). However, I should point out that, more often than not, the subjects to which Johnston refers in his formulations of the basic claim are characterized—rather unhelpfully, I think—as “we”.

¹¹Cf. Johnston (1993).

¹²For criticisms of a naturalistic response-dependent view, cf. McGinn (1997) and Johnston (1989).

¹³For a defense of this claim, cf. Searle (1995).

¹⁴McDowell (1985), p. 118.

¹⁵Op. cit., pp. 111, 120.

¹⁶Cf. McDowell (1978) and (1979). Cf., also, Little (1997) for an interpretation of McDowell's position.

¹⁷To save a few syllables, I shall use the term “moral judgment” to pick out the phenomenon of accurately apprehending and judging that one or another moral property is instantiated.

¹⁸Cf. Johnston (1993). Interestingly enough, Johnston's most thorough treatment of the response-dependent theory of value (Johnston (1989)) does not provide any explicit rationale for adopting the response-dependent view, claiming that its interest lies in the “details” of the position.

¹⁹Here is how Johnston puts the point: “... more antipathetic to the spirit of Pragmatism might be the idea that a set of truths could be *privileged* or *especially worth knowing* independently of any capacity of ours to come to recognize what is in our cognitive interest, the idea of *the* cognitive task being determined independently of such capacities. From that point of view, the core of the Metaphor of Nature's Toleration of various cognitive responses is the idea that the *rightness* of a cognitive response, such as accepting a theory, is not simply determined by the way nature is anyway, but is conceptually connected with certain facts about our capacity to recognize that the response is right ... Given a response-dispositional account of value or rightness, there are no independent justifiers of any of our responses.” Johnston (1993), pp. 113, 115.

²⁰Cf. Wiggins (1987) for a similar effort to “anthropomorphize” moral qualities.

²¹This argument is a blend of considerations adduced by Dancy (1986) and McGinn (1996).

²²Cf. McGinn (1996).

²³The same point can be pressed with respect to identities that are conceptually necessary. Not all conceptual truths are easy to spot!

²⁴Pargetter (1988), p. 115. I shall assume that although Pargetter speaks of the *property* of goodness being causally efficacious, he really means to say that its *instances* are causally efficacious.

²⁵My treatment of acquaintance is borrowed in essentials from Wolterstorff (2001).

²⁶Pargetter (1988), p. 115

²⁷Op cit. Pargetter points out that he means to rule out both conscious and unconscious inference.

²⁸This statement should be qualified in two ways. First, I realize that my argument here does not imply that we cannot be acquainted with the moral features of our own intentions, beliefs, etc., through, say, introspection. I am supposing, however, that this sort of acquaintance is not what Pargetter has in mind. Second, the present argument doesn't rule out the possibility that we can be acquainted with moral qualities by way of seeing that they are conceptually tied to other moral qualities or non-moral qualities. (For instance, I might just “see” that this instance of kindness deserves approbation.) But this kind of acquaintance is plausibly viewed as a species of intellection in which abstract relations are present to us. And premise (2) of the argument tells us that this is not the sort of case at issue in the argument.

²⁹Jackson (1996). The replies I offer to Jackson's arguments are indebted to Crane (1998).

³⁰Crane (1998), pp. 220–221. For Shoemaker's causal account of properties, cf. Shoemaker (1984).

³¹This version of the argument finds its inspiration in Johnston (1998).

³²Notice that this line of argument brings to light a manner in which McGinn's appeal to supervenience does not preserve the phenomenology of moral experience. According to McGinn, response-dependent qualities are not identical with dispositions, but supervene on dispositions.

As such, moral qualities appear to be monadic, non-relational qualities. Presumably, however, insofar as moral qualities appear to be non-relational, monadic qualities, nothing about our experience of them suggests that moral qualities existentially depend on the sorts of subjective responses to which their subvenient bases give rise. Thus, on McGinn's account, moral experience suggests that moral qualities are existentially independent of our subjective responses to their subvenient bases, when in reality they are not.

³³As Dancy (1988) points out.

³⁴An idealized view could perhaps throw light on why an *intimate* connection exists between the moral judgments and motivations of the ordinary virtuous agent. An advocate of the idealized view might say that insofar as a virtuous agent approximates the manner in which an ideal agent apprehends moral reality, we have a better understanding of why there is an intimate link which obtains between the judgments and motivations of the ordinary virtuous agent. But even if we grant this point, the idealized view would not throw any light on why there should be a *necessary* connection between the judgments and motivations of the ordinary virtuous agent and, hence, what the nature of that necessary connection is.

³⁵The principle resembles the "credulity principle" found in Swinburne (1979).

³⁶This is how McDowell (1985) puts it: "a primary quality would be objective in the sense that what it is for something to have it can be adequately understood otherwise than in terms of dispositions to give rise to subjective states" (p. 113).

³⁷I have addressed it in greater length in two other papers, Cuneo (1999) and Cuneo (unpublished). See Brink (1989) for an extended critique of motivational internalism. Let me also add that it is doubtful that the response-dependent view provides us with a *general* account of how virtuous persons are motivated. Virtuous persons are, after all, often motivated by *entertaining possibilities* and *grasping descriptions* of various states of affairs, and not by grasping moral qualities.

³⁸There are other complications here as well. For suppose we adopt a Platonist account of moral norms. According to the Platonist account, moral norms are abstract entities that do not existentially depend on human sensibilities. If such a view is correct, then even if one adopts a response-dependent view of moral qualities, there will be moral reasons, viz., moral norms, that are in principle inaccessible to human persons. Thus, stringent adherence to the principle that practically important facts cannot in principle outstrip our grasp of them would put direct pressure on the response-dependent theorist to reject an account of moral norms that many philosophers find independently plausible.

³⁹Indeed, they appear to say something even stronger, viz., that all values are response-dependent. Cf. Johnston (1989).

⁴⁰It may be that, as I have characterized it, sound practical reason is not *merely* a moral property; it may be that there are other non-moral, normative dimensions to the property as well. But that should not affect the argument I am offering.

⁴¹Cf. McGinn (1997) for just such a suggestion. In fact, it is difficult to see how else a (non-reductionist) response-dependent theorist might spell out what it is to be a suitable subject. One might propose an account which says that a suitable subject is a *virtuous* agent; but the property of being a virtuous agent is, if not identical with that of being a practically reasonable agent, included within that property. Virtuous persons are, if nothing else, practically reasonable persons.

⁴²My thanks to Erika Cuneo, Chris Eberle, John Greco, Phil Goggans, Margaret Little, Jennifer McKittrick, Luke Reinsma, Sabine Roeser, Jon Williford, René van Woudenberg, and especially Steve Layman, for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay. Thanks also to the Vrije University of Amsterdam for a fellowship that helped support the writing of this essay.

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