

Values and Secondary Qualities¹

1. J. L. Mackie insists that ordinary evaluative thought presents itself as a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world.² And this phenomenological thesis seems correct. When one or another variety of philosophical non-cognitivism claims to capture the truth about what the experience of value is like, or (in a familiar surrogate for phenomenology³) about what we mean by our evaluative language, the claim is never based on careful attention to the lived character of evaluative thought or discourse. The idea is, rather, that the very concept of the cognitive or factual rules out the possibility of an undiluted representation of how things are, enjoying, nevertheless, the internal relation to “attitudes” or the will that would be needed for it to count as evaluative.⁴ On this view the phenomenology of

1. This paper grew out of my contributions to a seminar on J. L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* that I had the privilege of sharing with Mackie and R. M. Hare in 1978. It was first published in a volume in Mackie's honour. I do not believe Mackie would have found it strange that I should pay tribute to a sadly missed colleague by continuing a strenuous disagreement with him.

2. See *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, pp. 31–5.

3. An inferior surrogate: it leads us to exaggerate the extent to which expressions of our sensitivity to values are signalled by the use of a special vocabulary. See Essay 6 above.

4. I am trying here to soften a sharpness of focus that Mackie introduces by stressing the idea of prescriptivity. Mackie's singleness of vision here has the perhaps unfortunate effect of discouraging a distinction such as David Wiggins has drawn between “evaluations” and “directives or deliberative (or practical) judgements” (“Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life”, pp. 95–6). My topic here is really the former of these. (It may be, however, that the distinction does not after all matter in the way Wiggins suggests; see n. 46 below.)

value would involve a mere incoherence, if it were as Mackie says—a possibility that then tends (naturally enough) not to be so much as entertained. But, as Mackie sees, there is no satisfactory justification for supposing that the factual is, by definition, attitudinatively and motivationally neutral. This clears away the only obstacle to accepting his phenomenological claim; and the upshot is that non-cognitivism must offer to correct the phenomenology of value, rather than to give an account of it.⁵

In Mackie's view the correction is called for. In this paper I want to suggest that he attributes an unmerited plausibility to this thesis, by giving a false picture of what one is committed to if one resists it.

2. Given that Mackie is right about the phenomenology of value, an attempt to accept the appearances makes it virtually irresistible to appeal to a perceptual model. Now Mackie holds that the model must be perceptual awareness of *primary* qualities.⁶ And this makes it comparatively easy to argue that the appearances are misleading. 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. Moreover, the primary-quality model turns the epistemology of value into mere mystification. The perceptual model is no more than a model; perception, strictly so called, does not mirror the role of reason in evaluative thinking, which seems to require us to regard the apprehension of value as an intellectual rather than a merely sensory matter. But if we are to take account of this, while preserving the model's picture of values as brutally and absolutely

5. I do not believe Simon Blackburn's “quasi-realism” is a real alternative to this. (See, e.g., p. 358 of his “Truth, Realism, and the Regulation of Theory”.) In so far as the quasi-realist holds that the values, in thinking and speaking about which he imitates the practices supposedly characteristic of realism, are *really* products of projecting “attitudes” into the world, he must have a conception of genuine reality—what the values lack and the things on to which they are projected have. And the phenomenological claim ought to be that *that* is what the appearances entice us to attribute to values.

6. See *Hume's Moral Theory*, pp. 32, 60–1, 73–4.

there, it seems that we need to postulate a faculty—"intuition"—about which all that can be said is that it makes us aware of objective rational connections; the model itself ensures that there is nothing helpful to say about how such a faculty might work, or why its deliverances might deserve to count as knowledge.

But why is it supposed that the model must be awareness of primary qualities rather than secondary qualities? The answer is that Mackie, following Locke, takes secondary-quality perception, as conceived by a pre-philosophical consciousness, to involve a projective error: one analogous to the error he finds in ordinary evaluative thought. He holds that we are prone to conceive secondary-quality experience in a way that would be appropriate for experience of primary qualities. So a pre-philosophical secondary-quality model for awareness of value would in effect be, after all, a primary-quality model. And to accept a philosophically corrected secondary-quality model for the awareness of value would be simply to give up trying to go along with the appearances.

I believe, however, that this conception of secondary-quality experience is seriously mistaken.

3. A secondary quality is a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance: specifically, an appearance characterizable by using a word for the property itself to say how the object perceptually appears. Thus an object's being red is understood as something that obtains in virtue of the object's being such as (in certain circumstances) to look, precisely, red.

This account of secondary qualities is faithful to one key Lockean doctrine, namely the identification of secondary qualities with "powers to produce various sensations in us".⁷ (The phrase "perceptual appearance", with its gloss, goes beyond Locke's unspecific "sensations", but harmlessly; it serves simply to restrict our attention, as

7. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 2.8.10.

Locke's word may not, to properties that are in a certain obvious sense perceptible.⁸⁾

I have written of what property-ascriptions are *understood* to be true in virtue of, rather than of what they are true in virtue of. No doubt it is true that a given thing is red in virtue of some microscopic textural property of its surface; but a predication understood only in such terms—not in terms of how the object would look—would not be an ascription of the secondary quality of redness.⁹

Secondary-quality experience presents itself as perceptual awareness of properties genuinely possessed by the objects that confront one. And there is no general obstacle to taking that appearance at face value.¹⁰ An object's being such as to look red is independent of its actually looking red to anyone on any particular occasion; so, notwithstanding the conceptual connection between being red and being experienced as red, an experience of something as red can count as a case of being presented with a property that is there anyway—there independently of the experience itself.¹¹ And there is no evident ground for accusing the appearance of being misleading. What would one expect it to be like to experience something's being such as to look red, if not to experience the thing in question (in the right circumstances) as looking, precisely, red?

On Mackie's account, by contrast, to take experiencing something as red at face value, as a non-misleading awareness of a property that really confronts one, is to attribute to the object a property that is "thoroughly objective",¹² in the sense that it does not need to be

8. Being stung by a nettle is an actualization of a power in the nettle that conforms to Locke's description, but it seems wrong to regard it as a perception of that power; the experience lacks a representational character that that would require. (It is implausible that looking red is intelligible independently of being red; combined with the account of secondary qualities that I am giving, this sets up a circle. But it is quite unclear that we ought to have the sort of analytic or definitional aspirations that would make the circle problematic. See Colin McGinn, *The Subjective View*, pp. 6–8.)

9. See McGinn, pp. 12–14.

10. Of course there is room for the concept of illusion, not only because the senses can malfunction but also because of the need for a modifier like my "in certain circumstances", in an account of what it is for something to have a secondary quality. (The latter has no counterpart with primary qualities.)

11. See the discussion of (one interpretation of the notion of) objectivity at pp. 77–8 of Gareth Evans, "Things Without the Mind". Throughout this section I am heavily indebted to this most important paper.

12. *Problems from Locke*, p. 18.

understood in terms of experiences that the object is disposed to give rise to; but which nevertheless resembles redness as it figures in our experience—this to ensure that the phenomenal character of the experience need not stand accused of misleadingness, as it would if the “thoroughly objective” property of which it constituted an awareness were conceived as a microscopic textural basis for the object’s disposition to look red. This use of the notion of resemblance corresponds to one key element in Locke’s exposition of the concept of a primary quality.¹³ In these Lockean terms Mackie’s view amounts to accusing a naive perceptive consciousness of taking secondary qualities for primary qualities.¹⁴

According to Mackie, this conception of primary qualities that resemble colours as we see them is coherent; that nothing is characterized by such qualities is established by merely empirical argument.¹⁵ But is the idea coherent? This would require two things: first, that colours figure in perceptual experience neutrally, so to speak, rather than as essentially phenomenal qualities of objects, qualities that could not be adequately conceived except in terms of how their possessors would look; and, second, that we command a concept of resemblance that would enable us to construct notions of possible primary qualities out of the idea of resemblance to such neutral elements of experience. The first of these requirements is quite dubious. (I shall return to this.) But even if we try to let it pass, the second requirement seems impossible. Starting with, say, redness as it (putatively neutrally) figures in our experience, we are asked to form the notion of a feature of objects that resembles that, but is adequately conceivable otherwise than in terms of how its possessors would look (since if it were adequately conceivable only in those terms it would simply be secondary). But the second part of these instructions leaves it wholly mysterious what to make of the first: it precludes the required resemblance being in phenomenal respects, but it is quite unclear what other sense we could make of the notion of resemblance to redness as it figures in our experience. (If we find no other, we have failed to let the first requirement pass; redness as it

13. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 2.8.15.

14. See *Problems from Locke*, p. 16.

15. See *Problems from Locke*, pp. 17–20.

figures in our experience proves stubbornly phenomenal.)¹⁶ I have indicated how we can make error-free sense of the thought that colours are authentic objects of perceptual awareness; in the face of that, it seems a gratuitous slur on perceptual "common sense" to accuse it of this wildly problematic understanding of itself.

Why is Mackie resolved, nevertheless, to convict "common sense" of error? Secondary qualities are qualities not adequately conceivable except in terms of certain subjective states, and thus subjective themselves in a sense that that characterization defines. In the natural contrast, 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. Now this contrast between objective and subjective is not a contrast between veridical and illusory experience. But it is easily confused with a different contrast, in which to call a putative object of awareness "objective" is to say that it is there to be experienced, as opposed to being a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it. If secondary qualities were subjective in the sense that naturally contrasts with this, naive consciousness would indeed be wrong about them, and we would need something like Mackie's Lockean picture of the error it commits. What is acceptable, though, is only that secondary qualities are subjective in the first sense, and it would be simply wrong to suppose this gives any support to the idea that they are subjective in the second.¹⁷

More specifically, Mackie seems insufficiently whole-hearted in an insight of his about perceptual experiences. In the case of "realistic" depiction, it makes sense to think of veridicality as a matter of resemblance between aspects of a picture and aspects of what it depicts.¹⁸ Mackie's insight is that the best hope of a philosophically hy-

16. Compare pp. 56–7 of P. F. Strawson, "Perception and Its Objects".

17. This is a different way of formulating a point made by McGinn, *The Subjective View*, p. 121. Mackie's phrase "the fabric of the world" belongs with the second sense of "objective", but I think his arguments really address only the first. *Pace* p. 103 of A. W. Price, "Varieties of Objectivity and Values", I do not think the phrase can be passed over as unhelpful, in favour of what the arguments do succeed in establishing, without missing something that Mackie wanted to say. (A gloss on "objective" as "there to be experienced" does not figure in Price's inventory of possible interpretations, p. 10. It seems to be the obvious response to his challenge at pp. 118–9.)

18. I do not say it is correct: scepticism about this is very much to the point. (See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, chap. 1.)

gienic interpretation for Locke's talk of "ideas", in a perceptual context, is in terms of "intentional objects": that is, aspects of representational content—aspects of how things seem to one in the enjoyment of a perceptual experience.¹⁹ Now it is an illusion to suppose, as Mackie does, that this warrants thinking of the relation between a quality and an "idea" of it on the model of the relation between a property of a picture's subject and an aspect of the picture. Explaining "ideas" as "intentional objects" should direct our attention to the relation between how things are and how an experience represents them as being—in fact identity, not resemblance, if the representation is veridical.²⁰ Mackie's Lockean appeal to resemblance fits something quite different: a relation borne to aspects of how things are by intrinsic aspects of a bearer of representational content—not how things are represented to be, but features of an item that does the representing, with particular aspects of its content carried by particular aspects of what it is intrinsically (non-representationally) like.²¹ Perceptual experiences have representational content; but nothing in Mackie's defence of the "intentional objects" gloss on "ideas" would force us to suppose that they have it in that sort of way.²²

19. See *Problems from Locke*, pp. 47–50.

20. When resemblance is in play, it functions as a palliative to lack of veridicality, not as what veridicality consists in.

21. Intrinsic features of experience, functioning as vehicles for aspects of content, seem to be taken for granted in Mackie's discussion of Molyneux's problem (*Problems from Locke*, pp. 28–32). The slide from talk of content to talk that fits only bearers of content seems to happen also in Mackie's discussion of truth, in *Truth, Probability, and Paradox*. There Mackie suggests that a formulation like "A true statement is one such that the way things are is the way it represents them as being" makes truth consist in a relation of correspondence (rather than identity) between how things are and how things are represented as being; pp. 56–7 come too late to undo the damage done by the earlier talk of "comparison", e.g. at pp. 50, 51. (A subject-matter for the talk that fits bearers is unproblematically available in this case; but Mackie does not mean to be discussing truth as a property of sentences or utterances.)

22. Indeed, this goes against the spirit of a passage about the word "content" at *Problems from Locke*, p. 48. Mackie's failure to profit from his insight emerges particularly strikingly in his remarkable claim (*Problems from Locke*, p. 50) that the "intentional object" conception of the content of experience yields an account of perception that is within the target area of "the stock objections against an argument from an effect to a supposed cause of a type which is never directly observed". (Part of the trouble here is a misconception of direct realism as a surely forlorn attempt to make perceptual knowledge unproblematic: *Problems from Locke*, p. 43.)

The temptation to which Mackie succumbs, to suppose that intrinsic features of experience function as vehicles for aspects of representational content, is indifferent to any distinction between primary and secondary qualities in the representational significance that these features supposedly carry. What it is for a colour to figure in experience and what it is for a shape to figure in experience would be alike, on this view, in so far as both are a matter of an experience's having a certain intrinsic feature. If one wants, within this framework, to preserve Locke's intuition that primary-quality experience is distinctive in potentially disclosing the objective properties of things, one will be naturally led to Locke's use of the notion of resemblance. But no notion of resemblance could get us from an essentially experiential state of affairs to the concept of a feature of objects intelligible otherwise than in terms of how its possessors would strike us. (I exploited a version of this point against Mackie's idea of possible primary qualities answering to "colours as we see them"; it tells equally against the Lockean conception of shapes.)

If one gives up the Lockean use of resemblance, but retains the idea that primary and secondary qualities are experientially on a par, one will be led to suppose that the properties attributed to objects in the "manifest image" are all equally phenomenal—intelligible, that is, only in terms of how their possessors are disposed to appear. Properties that are objective, in the contrasting sense, can then figure only in the "scientific image".²³ On these lines one altogether loses hold of Locke's intuition that primary qualities are distinctive in being both objective and perceptible.²⁴

If we want to preserve the intuition, as I believe we should, then we need to exorcize the idea that what it is for a quality to figure in experience is for an experience to have a certain intrinsic feature: in fact I believe we need to reject these supposed vehicles of content altogether. Then we can say that colours and shapes figure in experience, not as the representational significance carried by features that are—being intrinsic features of experience—indifferently subjective

23. The phrases "manifest image" and "scientific image" are due to Wilfrid Sellars; see "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man".

24. This is the position of Strawson, "Perception and Its Objects" (and see also his "Reply to Evans"). I am suggesting a diagnosis, to back up McGinn's complaint, *The Subjective View*, p. 124.

(which makes it hard to see how a difference in respect of objectivity could show up in their representational significance); but simply as properties that objects are represented as having, distinctively phenomenal in the one case and not so in the other. (Without the supposed intrinsic features, we should be immune to the illusion that experiences cannot represent objects as having properties that are not phenomenal—properties that are adequately conceivable otherwise than in terms of dispositions to produce suitable experiences.)²⁵ What Locke infelicitously tried to yoke together, with his picture of real resemblances of our “ideas”, can now divide into two notions that we must insist on keeping separate: first, the possible veridicality of experience (the objectivity of its object, in the second of the two senses I distinguished), in respect of which primary and secondary qualities are on all fours; and, second, the not essentially phenomenal character of some properties that experience represents objects as having (their objectivity in the first sense), which marks off the primary perceptible qualities from the secondary ones.

In order to deny that a quality's figuring in experience consists in an experience's having a certain intrinsic feature, we do not need to reject the intrinsic features altogether; it would suffice to insist that a quality's figuring in experience consists in an experience's having a certain intrinsic feature *together with* the quality's being the representational significance carried by that feature. But I do not believe that this yields a position in which accepting the supposed vehicles of content coheres with a satisfactory account of perception. This position would have it that the fact that an experience represents things as being one way rather than another is strictly additional to the experience's intrinsic nature, and so extrinsic to the experience itself (it seems natural to say “read into it”). There is a phenomenological falsification here. (This brings out a third role for Locke's resemblance, namely to obviate the threat of such a falsification by constituting a sort of intrinsic representationality: Locke's “ideas” carry

25. Notice Strawson's sleight of hand with phrases such as “shapes-as-seen”, at p. 280 of “Reply to Evans”. Strawson's understanding of what Evans is trying to say fails altogether to accommodate Evans's remark (“Things Without the Mind”, p. 96) that “to deny that primary properties are *sensory* is not at all to deny that they are *sensible* or *observable*”. Shapes as seen are *shapes*—that is, non-sensory properties; it is one thing to deny, as Evans does, that experience can furnish us with the concepts of such properties, but quite another to deny that experience can disclose instantiations of them to us.

the representational significance they do by virtue of what they are like, and this can be glossed both as “how they are intrinsically” and as “what they resemble”.) In any case, given that we cannot project ourselves from features of experience to non-phenomenal properties of objects by means of an appeal to resemblance, it is doubtful that the metaphor of representational significance being “read into” intrinsic features can be spelled out in such a way as to avoid the second horn of our dilemma. How could representational significance be “read into” intrinsic features of experience in such a way that what was signified did not need to be understood in terms of them? How could a not intrinsically representational feature of experience become imbued with objective significance in such a way that an experience could count, by virtue of having that feature, as a direct awareness of a not essentially phenomenal property of objects?²⁶

How things strike someone as being is, in a clear sense, a subjective matter: there is no conceiving it in abstraction from the subject of the experience. Now a motive for insisting on the supposed vehicles of aspects of content might lie in an aspiration, familiar in philosophy, to bring subjectivity within the compass of a fundamentally objective conception of reality.²⁷ If aspects of content are not carried by elements in an intrinsic structure, their subjectivity is irreducible. By contrast, one might hope to objectivize any “essential subjectivity” that needs to be attributed to not intrinsically representational features of experience, by exploiting a picture involving special access on a subject’s part to something conceived in a broadly objective way—its presence in the world not conceived as constituted by the subject’s special access to it.²⁸ Given this move, it becomes natural to

26. Features of physiologically specified states are not to the point here. Such features are not apparent in experience; whereas the supposed features that I am concerned with would have to be aspects of what experience is like for us, in order to function intelligibly as carriers for aspects of the content that experience presents to us. There may be an inclination to ask why it should be any harder for a feature of experience to acquire an objective significance than it is for a word to do so. But the case of language affords no counterpart to the fact that the objective significance in the case we are concerned with is a matter of how things (e.g.) look to be; the special problem is to prevent that “look” from having the effect that a supposed intrinsic feature of experience gets taken up into its own representational significance, thus ensuring that the significance is phenomenal and not primary.

27. See Thomas Nagel, “Subjective and Objective”.

28. Compare Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*, p. 295.

suppose that the phenomenal character of the “manifest image” can be explained in terms of a certain familiar picture: one in which a confronted “external” reality, conceived as having only an objective nature, is processed through a structured “subjectivity”, conceived in this objectivistic manner. This picture seems to capture the essence of Mackie’s approach to the secondary qualities.²⁹ What I have tried to suggest is that the picture is suspect in threatening to cut us off from the *primary* (not essentially phenomenal) qualities of the objects that we perceive: either (with the appeal to resemblance) making it impossible, after all, to keep an essentially phenomenal character out of our conception of the qualities in question, or else making them merely hypothetical, not accessible to perception. If we are to achieve a satisfactory understanding of experience’s openness to objective reality, we must put a more radical construction on experience’s essential subjectivity. And this removes an insidious obstacle—one whose foundation is summarily captured in Mackie’s idea that it is not simply wrong to count “colours as we see them” as items in our minds³⁰—that stands in the way of understanding how secondary-quality experience can be awareness, with nothing misleading about its phenomenal character, of properties genuinely possessed by elements in a not exclusively phenomenal reality.

4. The empirical ground that Mackie thinks we have for not postulating “thoroughly objective features which resemble our ideas of secondary qualities”³¹ is that attributing such features to objects is surplus to the requirements of explaining our experience of secondary qualities.³² If it would be incoherent to attribute such features to objects, as I believe, this empirical argument falls away as

29. Although McGinn, in *The Subjective View*, is not taken in by the idea that “external” reality has only objective characteristics, I am not sure that he sufficiently avoids the picture that underlies that idea; see pp. 106–9. This connects with a suspicion that at pp. 9–10 he partly succumbs to a temptation to objectivize the subjective properties of objects he countenances. It is not as clear as he seems to suppose that, say, redness can be, so to speak, abstracted from the way things strike us by an appeal to relativity. His worry at pp. 132–6, that secondary-quality experience may after all be phenomenologically misleading, seems to betray the influence of the idea of content-bearing intrinsic features of experience.

30. See the diagram at *Problems from Locke*, p. 17.

31. *Problems from Locke*, pp. 18–19.

32. See *Problems from Locke*, pp. 17–18.

unnecessary. But it is worth considering how an argument from explanatory superfluity might fare against the less extravagant construal I have suggested for the thought that secondary qualities genuinely characterize objects; not because the question is difficult or contentious, but because of the light it casts on how an explanatory test for reality—which is commonly thought to undermine the claims of values—should be applied.

A “*virtus dormitiva*” objection would tell against the idea that one might mount a satisfying explanation of an object’s looking red on its being such as to look red. The weight of the explanation would fall through the disposition to its structural ground.³³ Still, however, optimistic we are about the prospects for explaining colour experience on the basis of surface textures,³⁴ it would be obviously wrong to suppose that someone who gave such an explanation could in consistency deny that the object was such as to look red. The right explanatory test is not whether something pulls its own weight in the favoured explanation (it may fail to do so without thereby being explained away), but whether the explainer can consistently deny its reality.³⁵

Given Mackie’s view about secondary qualities, the thought that values fail an explanatory test for reality is implicit in a parallel that he commonly draws between them.³⁶ It is nearer the surface in his “argument from queerness”,³⁷ and explicit in his citing “patterns of objectification” to explain the distinctive phenomenology of value experience.³⁸ Now it is, if anything, even more obvious with values than with essentially phenomenal qualities that they cannot be credited with causal efficacy: values would not pull their weight in any explanation of value experience even remotely analogous to the stan-

33. See McGinn, p. 14.

34. There are difficulties about how complete such explanations could aspire to be. See Price, “Varieties of Objectivity and Values”, pp. 114–5; and Essay 6 above.

35. Compare pp. 206–8 of David Wiggins, “What Would Be a Substantial Theory of Truth?” The test of whether the explanations in question are consistent with rejecting the item in question is Wiggins’s suggestion, in the course of a continuing attempt to improve the formulation there. I am indebted to discussion with him.

36. See, e.g., *Hume’s Moral Theory*, pp. 51–2; *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, pp. 19–20.

37. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, pp. 38–42.

38. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, pp. 42–6. See also Simon Blackburn, “Rule-Following and Moral Realism”; and chap. 1 of Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*.

dard explanations of primary-quality experience. But reflection on the case of secondary qualities has already opened a gap between that admission and any concession that values are not genuine aspects of reality. And the point is reinforced by a crucial disanalogy between values and secondary qualities. To press the analogy 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 that (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” (as a colour is merely such as to cause the appropriate experiences), but rather such as to *merit* it. And this makes it doubtful whether merely causal explanations of value experience are relevant to the explanatory test, even to the extent that the question to ask is whether someone could consistently give such explanations while denying that the values involved are real. It looks as if we should be raising that question about explanations of a different kind.

For simplicity’s sake, I shall elaborate this point in connection with something that is not a value, though it shares the crucial feature: namely danger or the fearful. On the face of it, this might seem a promising subject for a projectivist treatment (a treatment that appeals to what Hume called the mind’s “propensity to spread itself on external objects”).³⁹ At any rate the response that, according to such a treatment, is projected into the world can be characterized, without phenomenological falsification, otherwise than in terms of seeming to find the supposed product of projection already there.⁴⁰ And it would be obviously grotesque to fancy that a case of fear might be

39. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.3.14. “Projectivist” is Blackburn’s useful label; see “Rule-Following and Moral Realism”, and “Opinions and Chances”.

40. At pp. 180–1 of “Opinions and Chances”, Blackburn suggests that a projectivist need not mind whether or not this is so; but I think he trades on a slide between “can . . . only be understood in terms of” and “our best vocabulary for identifying” (which allows that there may be an alternative, though it will be inferior).

explained as the upshot of a mechanical (or perhaps para-mechanical) process initiated by an instance of "objective fearfulness". But if what we are engaged in is an "attempt to understand ourselves",⁴¹ then merely causal explanations of responses like fear will not be satisfying anyway.⁴² What we want here is a style of explanation that makes sense of what is explained (in so far as sense can be made of it). This means that a technique for giving satisfying explanations of cases of fear—which would perhaps amount to a satisfactory explanatory theory of danger, though the label is possibly too grand—must allow for the possibility of criticism; we make sense of fear by seeing it as a response to objects that *merit* such a response, or as the intelligibly defective product of a propensity towards responses that would be intelligible in that way.⁴³ For an object to merit fear just is for it to be fearful. So explanations of fear that manifest our capacity to understand ourselves in this region of our lives will simply not cohere with the claim that reality contains nothing in the way of fearfulness.⁴⁴ Any such claim would undermine the intelligibility that the explanations confer on our responses.

The shared crucial feature suggests that this disarming of a supposed explanatory argument for unreality should carry over to the case of values. There is, of course, a striking disanalogy in the contentiousness that is typical of values; but I think it would be a mistake to suppose that this spoils the point. In so far as we succeed in achieving the sort of understanding of our responses that is in question, we do so on the basis of preparedness to attribute, to at least some possible objects of the responses, properties that would validate the responses. What the disanalogy makes especially clear is that the explanations that preclude our denying the reality of the special properties that are putatively discernible from some (broadly)

41. The phrase is from p. 165 of Blackburn, "Rule-Following and Moral Realism".

42. I do not mean that satisfying explanations will not be causal. But they will not be *merely* causal.

43. I am assuming that it is not a question of a theory according to which no responses of the kind in question *could* be well-placed. That would have a quite unintended effect. (See *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, p. 16.) Notice that it will not meet my point to suggest that calling a response "well-placed" is to be understood only quasi-realistically. Explanatory indispensability is supposed to be the test for the *genuine* reality supposedly lacked by what warrants only quasi-realistic treatment.

44. Compare Blackburn, "Rule-Following and Moral Realism", p. 164.

evaluative point of view are themselves constructed from that point of view. (We already had this in the case of the fearful, but the point is brought home when the validation of the responses is controversial.) However, the critical dimension of the explanations that we want means that there is no question of just any actual response pulling itself up by its own bootstraps into counting as an undistorted perception of the relevant special aspect of reality.⁴⁵ Indeed, awareness that values are contentious tells against an unreflective contentment with the current state of one's critical outlook, and in favour of a readiness to suppose that there may be something to be learned from people with whom one's first inclination is to disagree. The aspiration to understand oneself is an aspiration to change one's responses, if that is necessary for them to become intelligible otherwise than as defective. But although a sensible person will never be confident that his evaluative outlook is incapable of improvement, that need not stop him supposing, of some of his evaluative responses, that their objects really do merit them. He will be able to back up this supposition with explanations that show how the responses are well-placed; the explanations will share the contentiousness of the values whose reality they certify, but that should not prevent him from accepting the explanations any more than (what nobody thinks) it should prevent him from endorsing the values.⁴⁶ There is perhaps an air of bootstrapping about this. But if we restrict ourselves to explanations from a more external standpoint, at which values are not in our field of view, we deprive ourselves of a kind of

45. This will be so even in a case in which there are no materials for constructing standards of criticism except actual responses—something that is not so with fearfulness, although given a not implausible holism it will be so with values.

46. I can see no reason why we should not regard the contentiousness as ineliminable. The effect of this would be to detach the explanatory test of reality from a requirement of convergence (compare the passage from Wiggins cited in n. 35 above). As far as I can see, this separation would be a good thing. It would enable resistance to projectivism to free itself, with a good conscience, from some unnecessary worries about relativism. It might also discourage a misconception of the appeal to Wittgenstein that comes naturally to such a position. (Blackburn, at pp. 170–4 of "Rule-Following and Moral Realism", reads into Essay 10 below an interpretation of Wittgenstein as, in effect, making truth a matter of consensus, and has no difficulty in arguing that this will not make room for hard cases. But the interpretation is not mine.) With the requirement of consensus dropped, or at least radically relativized to a point of view, the question of the claim to truth of directives may come closer to the question of the truth status of evaluations than Wiggins suggests in "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life".

intelligibility that we aspire to; and projectivists have given no reason whatever to suppose that there would be anything better about whatever different kind of self-understanding the restriction would permit.

5. It will be obvious how these considerations undermine the damaging effect of the primary-quality model. 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. Values are not brutally there—not there independently of our sensibility—any more than colours are: though, as with colours, this does not prevent us from supposing that they are there independently of any particular apparent experience of them. As for the epistemology of value, the epistemology of danger is a good model. (Fearfulness is not a secondary quality, although the model is available only after the primary-quality model has been dislodged. A secondary-quality analogy for value experience gives out at certain points, no less than the primary-quality analogy that Mackie attacks.) To drop the primary-quality model in this case is to give up the idea that fearfulness itself, were it real, would need to be intelligible from a standpoint independent of the propensity to fear; the same must go for the relations of rational consequentiality in which fearfulness stands to more straightforward properties of things.⁴⁷ Explanations of fear of the sort I envisaged would not only establish, from a different standpoint, that some of its objects are really fearful, but also make plain, case by case, what it is about them that makes them so; this should leave it quite unmysterious how a fear response rationally grounded in awareness (unproblematic, at least for present purposes) of these “fearful-making characteristics” can be counted as being, or yielding, knowledge that one is confronted by an instance of real fearfulness.⁴⁸

Simon Blackburn has written, on behalf of a projectivist sentimentalism in ethics, that “we profit . . . by realizing that a training of the feelings rather than a cultivation of a mysterious ability to spot the

47. Mackie’s question (*Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, p. 41) “Just what *in the world* is signified by this ‘because’?” involves a tendentious notion of “the world”.

48. See Price, “Varieties of Objectivity and Values”, pp. 106–7, 115.

immutable fitnesses of things is the foundation of how to live".⁴⁹ This picture of what an opponent of projectivism must hold is of a piece with Mackie's primary-quality model; it simply fails to fit the position I have described.⁵⁰ Perhaps with Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom in mind, one might ask why a training of the feelings (as long as the notion of feeling is comprehensive enough) cannot *be* the cultivation of an ability—utterly unmysterious just because of its connections with feelings—to spot (if you like) the fitnesses of things; even "immutable" may be all right, so long as it is not understood (as I take it Blackburn intends) to suggest a "platonistic" conception of the fitnesses of things, which would reimport the characteristic ideas of the primary-quality model.⁵¹

Mackie's response to this suggestion used to be, in effect, that it simply conceded his point.⁵² Can a projectivist claim that the position I have outlined is at best a notational variant, perhaps an inferior notational variant, of his own position?

It would be inferior if, in eschewing the projectivist metaphysical framework, it obscured some important truth. But what truth would this be? It will not do at this point to answer "The truth of projectivism". I have disarmed the explanatory argument for the projectivist's thin conception of genuine reality. What remains is rhetoric expressing what amounts to a now unargued primary-quality model for genuine reality.⁵³ The picture that this suggests for value experience—objective (value-free) reality processed through a moulded subjectivity—is no less questionable than the picture of secondary-quality experience on which, in Mackie at any rate, it is explicitly

49. "Rule-Following and Moral Realism", p. 186.

50. As Blackburn conceives moral realism, it evades the explanatory burdens that sentimentalism discharges, by making the world rich (compare p. 181) and picturing it as simply setting its print on us. Compare Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, p. 22: "If there were something in the fabric of the world that validated certain kinds of concern, then it would be possible to acquire these merely by finding something out, by letting one's thinking be controlled by how things were." This saddles an opponent of projectivism with a picture of awareness of value as an exercise of pure receptivity; it prevents him from deriving any profit from an analogy with secondary-quality perception.

51. On "platonism", see Essay 10 below. On Aristotle, see M. F. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good".

52. Price, "Varieties of Objectivity and Values", p. 107, cites Mackie's response to one of my contributions to the 1978 seminar (see n. 1 above).

53. We must not let the confusion between the two notions of objectivity that I distinguished in §3 above seem to support this conception of reality.

modelled. In fact I would be inclined to argue that it is projectivism that is inferior. Deprived of the specious explanatory argument, projectivism has nothing to sustain its thin conception of reality (that on to which the projections are effected) but a contentiously substantial version of the correspondence theory of truth, with the associated picture of genuinely true judgement as something to which the judger makes no contribution at all.⁵⁴

I do not want to argue this now. The point I want to make is that even if projectivism were not actually worse, metaphysically speaking, than the alternative I have described, it would be wrong to regard the issue between them as nothing but a question of metaphysical preference.⁵⁵ In the projectivist picture, having one's ethical or aesthetic responses rationally suited to their objects would be a matter of having the relevant processing mechanism functioning acceptably. Now projectivism can of course perfectly well accommodate the idea of assessing one's processing mechanism. But it pictures the mechanism as something that one can contemplate as an object in itself. It would be appropriate to say "something one can step back from", were it not for the fact that one needs to use the mechanism itself in assessing it; but at any rate one is supposed to be able to step back from any naively realistic acceptance of the values that the first-level employment of the mechanism has one attribute to items in the world. How, then, are we to understand this pictured availability of the processing mechanism as an object for contemplation, separated off from the world of value? Is there any alternative to thinking of it as capable of being captured, at least in theory, by a set of principles for superimposing values on to a value-free reality? The upshot is that the search for an evaluative outlook one can endorse as rational

54. Blackburn uses the correspondence theorist's pictures for rhetorical effect, but he is properly sceptical about whether this sort of realism makes sense (see "Truth, Realism, and the Regulation of Theory"). His idea is that the explanatory argument makes a counterpart to the metaphysical favouritism characteristic of this sort of realism safely available to a projectivist about values. Deprived of the explanatory argument, this projectivism should simply wither away. (See "Rule-Following and Moral Realism", p. 165. Of course I am not saying that the thin conception of reality that Blackburn's projectivism needs is unattainable, in the sense of being unformulable. What we lack is reasons of a respectable kind to recognize it as a complete conception of *reality*.)

55. Something like this seems to be suggested by Price, "Varieties of Objectivity and Values", pp. 107–8.

becomes, virtually irresistibly, a search for such a set of principles: a search for a *theory* of beauty or goodness. One comes to count “intuitions” as respectable only in so far as they can be validated by an approximation to that ideal.⁵⁶ (This is the shape that the attempt to objectivize subjectivity takes here.) I have a hunch that such efforts are misguided; not that we should rest content with an “anything goes” irrationalism, but that we need a conception of rationality in evaluation that will cohere with the possibility that particular cases may stubbornly resist capture in any general net. Such a conception is straightforwardly available within the alternative to projectivism that I have described. I allowed that being able to explain cases of fear in the right way might amount to having a theory of danger, but there is no need to generalize that feature of the case; the explanatory capacity that certifies the special objects of an evaluative outlook as real, and certifies its responses to them as rational, would need to be exactly as creative and case-specific as the capacity to discern those objects itself. (It would be the same capacity: the picture of “stepping back” does not fit here.)⁵⁷ I take it that my hunch poses a question of moral and aesthetic taste, which—like other questions of taste—should be capable of being argued about. The trouble with

56. It is hard to see how a rational *inventing* of values could take a more piecemeal form.

57. Why do I suggest that a particularistic conception of evaluative rationality is unavailable to a projectivist? See Blackburn, “Rule-Following and Moral Realism”, pp. 167–70. In the terms of that discussion, the point is that (with no good explanatory argument for his metaphysical favouritism) a projectivist has no alternative to being “a *real* realist” about the world on which he thinks values are superimposed. He cannot stop this from generating a quite un-Wittgensteinian picture of what *really* going on in the same way would be; which means that *he* cannot appeal to Wittgenstein in order to avert, as Blackburn puts it, “the threat which shapelessness poses to a respectable notion of consistency” (p. 169). So, at any rate, I meant to argue in Essay 10 below, to which Blackburn’s paper is a reply. Blackburn thinks his projectivism is untouched by the argument, because he thinks he can sustain projectivism’s metaphysical favouritism without appealing to “*real* realism”, on the basis of the explanatory argument. But I have urged that this is an illusion. (At p. 181 Blackburn writes: “Of course, it is true that our reactions are ‘simply felt’ and, in a sense, not rationally explicable.” He thinks he can comfortably say this because our conception of reason will go along with the quasi-realist truth that his projectivism confers on some evaluations. But how can one restrain the metaphysical favouritism a projectivist must show from generating some such thought as “This is not *real* reason”? If that is allowed to happen, a remark like the one I have quoted will merely threaten—like an ordinary nihilism—to dislodge us from our ethical and aesthetic convictions.)

projectivism is that it threatens to bypass that argument, on the basis of a metaphysical picture whose purported justification falls well short of making it compulsory. We should not let the question seem to be settled by what stands revealed, in the absence of compelling argument, as a prejudice claiming the honour due to metaphysical good taste.