

INSTANCES OF INSTANTIATION: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN  
SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE PROPERTIES

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by

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This thesis explores the prospects of a distinction between subjective and objective properties in terms of how they are instantiated.

While there are many ways in which the subjective can be separated from the objective, the one that interests me here is the difference between properties instantiated subjectively and properties instantiated objectively. The idea is that in some cases what makes it so that object  $o$  has the property  $p$  is what a thinking subject thinks of it or how she reacts to it, while in other cases what makes it so that  $o$  has  $p$  has nothing to do with what the subject thinks or does. In the first kind of case, the instantiation of the property is mind-dependent, or subjective, and in the second kind of case the instantiation is mind-independent, or objective.

I examine ways to draw a distinction between subjective and objective properties in this sense and defend the possibility of such a distinction against conceivable threats. I then go on to arguing that instead of sorting properties into two groups, subjective and objective, it is more fruitful to think of them as on a continuum ranging from entirely subjective to entirely objective. While there may be cases of properties that are entirely objective, i.e. instantiated only objectively, finding entirely subjective properties is more difficult.

Candidates for subjective properties do not seem to be exclusively subjective; i.e. they are instantiated objectively to some extent.

I use color as a paradigm case to argue for my account of properties whose instantiation is partly objective and partly subjective. I then go on to arguing that all sensory properties should be treated as color in this respect.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Eyja Margrét Brynjarsdóttir was born in Reykjavík, Iceland on 5 December, 1969. She completed her B.A. in philosophy at the University of Iceland in 1992, and received the degree of Master of Arts from Cornell University in 1997. Eyja currently resides in Iceland and is joining the faculty of the philosophy department of the University of Iceland this year.

for Agni

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch	iii
Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents	vi
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Subjective and Objective Instantiation	1
1.2. On Objective and Subjective Properties	2
1.3. Response-Dependence and Subjectivity	6
1.4. On Two Challenges	9
1.5. Are Sensory Properties Subjective or Objective?	11
<b>2 On Objective and Subjective Properties</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1. A Distinction Between Two Kinds of Properties	16
2.2. Objectivity and Subjectivity	17
2.3. Primary and Secondary Qualities	23
2.4. The Appearance-Reality Distinction	30
2.5. It's All about the Concepts	36
2.6. Another Epistemically Motivated Distinction	41
2.7. What Now?	47
<b>3 Response-Dependence and Subjectivity</b>	<b>49</b>
3.1. Response-Dependence	49
3.2. What is Response-Dependence?	50
3.3. Concepts or Properties?	55
3.4. Rigidity	59
3.5. On Relativity, Biconditionals, and More	67
3.6. The Distinction	70
<b>4 On Two Challenges</b>	<b>73</b>
4.1. Why Reject the Distinction?	73
4.2. No Subjective Properties	74

4.2.1. Faultless Disagreement	75
4.2.2. Subjective Facts	82
4.2.3. Rosen's Arguments	84
4.2.4. So, What About Subjective Properties?	90
4.3. The Lure of Subjectivism	93
4.3.1. Egalitarianism	94
4.3.2. Pluralism	98
4.3.3. Becoming Doubtfree	104
4.3.4. Social Construction	105
4.4. Conclusion	109
<b>5 Are Sensory Properties Subjective or Objective?</b>	<b>111</b>
5.1. Sensory Properties	111
5.2. Color	112
5.2.1. Primitivism	114
5.2.2. Error Theories	120
5.2.3. A Resemblance Thesis Upside Down	123
5.2.4. Color Concepts and Color Properties	124
5.2.5. Colors are Subjective and Objective	129
5.3. Sensory Properties	135
5.3.1. Why Should there Be a Difference?	137
5.3.2. Crossmodality and Molyneux's Question	144
5.4. Conclusion	147
<b>6 Afterthoughts</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>152</b>

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Subjective and Objective Instantiation

The focus of this dissertation is the distinction between subjective and objective properties. Can such a distinction be made and if so on what grounds? Of course there are several different ways to sort properties into different types, and I am not looking at all of them. More specifically, my focus is on different ways for properties to be instantiated; different ways for objects to have their properties. Are some properties such that what it is for things to have them is fundamentally different from what it is for them to have certain other properties? Hence, my search is for a distinction between objectively and subjectively instantiated properties. Is the instantiation of some properties subjective, or mind-dependent, in a sense in which the instantiation of some other properties is not?

After examining some attempts at making this kind of distinction, I come to the conclusion that the subjective properties I want are response-dependent in a specific sense. But there are other things that can be said about them, such as that they are subject-relative and that we do not distinguish between their appearing to be instantiated and really being instantiated. These are all things that differentiate subjective from objective properties.

After outlining my account of a distinction between subjective and objective properties, I consider how it might be rejected from two different directions. One involves rejecting the possibility of subjective properties while

the other rejects the possibility of objective properties. I argue that neither poses a lasting threat to my account.

Although I first defend an account of a distinction between subjectively and objectively instantiated properties, I go on to amend it to an account of subjective and objective instantiation. That is, I claim that the same property can be both subjectively and objectively instantiated. This may not be true of all properties, but for some it seems to be the most viable account. I develop such an account by using color as a prototype. I then argue that the same holds for other sensory properties.

In what follows I describe the role of each chapter.

## **1.2. On Objective and Subjective Properties**

In Chapter 2, I first discuss the notions of *subjective* and *objective*. What do the terms *subjective* and *objective* mean? The pair of terms *subjective* and *objective* can stand for many things. Sometimes it indicates an epistemological distinction. In that case, what we know objectively or have come to know objectively is something we know without an allusion to our personal experiences or a personal point of view. What we know subjectively is, on the other hand, something we base on our personal experiences. The terms *subjective* and *objective* can also stand for a methodological distinction or a difference in attitude toward a subject. An example of this is when we expect a judge to be objective in her rulings. My focus, however, is on the third notion of *subjective* and *objective*; the ontological notion. And more narrowly, I will be

looking at the distinction between the subjective and the objective when applied to properties in an ontological sense.

I go on to examining some of the ways in which the subjective/objective distinction has been made for properties. I find none of them adequate, although I think there are some insights from some of them that deserve to be retained. Before going through these attempts, however, I discuss the terms *subjective* and *objective* more generally. I take a brief look at their history: interestingly, their current use is almost perfectly opposite to their medieval use. I then examine what appears to be the layperson's use of these terms and find that there is a connection between subjectivity and relativity in the layperson's mind that may be worth holding onto to some degree.

The first way I consider of making a distinction between objective and subjective properties is Locke's account of primary and secondary qualities<sup>1</sup>. Many have claimed that the primary qualities are objective, mind-independent, whereas the secondary qualities are subjective, mind-dependent. I argue that it is by no means obvious that this is the case. Locke's secondary qualities are frequently understood as dispositions to produce subjective reactions while primary qualities are considered categorical properties or more basic. I explain that there is no reason to think of a disposition to produce a subjective reaction as mind-dependent in the sense relevant for the distinction for which I am aiming. While the manifestation of the disposition, i.e. the subjective reaction itself, is obviously (and even trivially) mind-dependent (it cannot take place without itself), the instantiation of the disposition to produce it cannot be dependent on the occurrence of the reaction. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility of a disposition to

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Locke (1975).

produce a subjective reaction being mind-dependent, but the reason for that must be something other than its being a disposition of this type.

Another somewhat common interpretation of Locke's primary and secondary quality distinction is an error theoretic interpretation according to which we falsely project the secondary qualities onto the objects without them having any corresponding properties. On that interpretation, the objects only have primary qualities; the secondary qualities exist only in our heads. This cannot be used for making a distinction between objective and subjective properties, as it only leaves one kind of properties in the objects. According to a distinction between objective and subjective properties, both types of properties are instantiated in the objects.

Finally, Locke's primary/secondary quality distinction is focused on properties that we perceive with our five senses and attribute to objects on that basis. A distinction between objective and subjective properties has a wider scope. We often attribute various kinds of properties to objects for reasons very different from our perceiving them (or believing that we perceive them) and I am looking for a distinction that can be used for all properties regardless of whether they ever are (or can be) perceived.

Another suggestion for how to distinguish between subjective and objective properties involves a focus on objective properties. The idea is that an objective property is a property for which we make an appearance/reality distinction. If it can appear to me that an object has a property  $p$  without it really having  $p$ , or if an object can really have  $p$  without it appearing to anyone that it does, then  $p$  is an objective property. For a subjective property, on the other hand, appearing to have the property and really having the property amount to the same thing.

While I think there is much to be said for this account, I believe it has some flaws. One is that it is not a clear-cut matter for which properties we make this kind of distinction and for which we do not. Quite a few properties seem to fall in some in-between category for which we sometimes find an appearance/reality distinction appropriate and sometimes not. Another flaw is that I find this account insufficient as an explanation for why and how some properties come to fall into one category while other properties fall into another. My conclusion is that while the core idea in this account is worth saving, it requires further elaboration.

After this, I discuss accounts according to which a move seems to be made from epistemology to ontology. Some philosophers seem to have assumed that an ontological distinction between objective and subjective properties somehow follows from a distinction between different ways of conceiving of properties or from different ways of knowing about them. I briefly consider whether this can be true; that is, that it really is so that properties of which the conception requires an allusion to phenomenal experiences are also ontologically mind-dependent whereas properties of which we can conceive without such an allusion are instantiated independently of our minds. I find that no such ontological conclusion follows from the epistemological distinction.

Finally, I draw attention to the idea of response-dependent properties, which I think can be of use in making the kind of distinction for which I am looking.

### 1.3. Response-Dependence and Subjectivity

So-called response-dependence has by some been considered the solution to the gap between the subjective and the objective, i.e. that response-dependent properties are the paradigm subjective properties. Obviously, such a claim cannot be evaluated without a clear account of what response-dependence is and what it entails. I go through some of the main accounts of response-dependence and find that there are two ways of defining it: one in terms of concepts and the other in terms of properties. Defining response-dependence for concepts does not seem helpful for sorting properties into two groups, whereas defining it for properties seems more promising. I examine this second option, trying to get a clearer account of exactly how we can get subjectivity through response-dependence.

As defined by Mark Johnston (1993), a response-dispositional concept is a concept of a disposition to produce a mental response in a certain subject or group of subjects under some specified conditions. For example, *nauseating* and *tiresome* would be such concepts. Johnston calls a concept response-dependent if it is a response-dispositional concept or “a truthfunctional or quantificational combination of concepts with at least one non-redundant element being a response-dispositional concept” (p. 104).

While Johnston’s definition is focused on the kind of property that is the content of the response-dependent concept, I examine whether it, or something similar to it, can also entail something that makes the possession of the concept dependent on an experience of the associated response. For instance, I consider whether it can mean that someone who has never experienced nausea cannot possess the concept *nauseating*. That does not seem plausible. I consider two possible explanations of how someone who



has never felt nauseated can still possess the associated concept: 1) That while both nausea sufferers and those with exceptionally stable stomachs possess the concept *nauseating*, the latter group must ride on the first-hand experience of others and their testimony. While both groups share the concepts, their conceptions of *nauseating* differ. 2) That there are two different concepts associated with nausea; one response-dependent reserved for those with first-hand knowledge of it, and one for the others.

On both readings above, the concept can be considered dependent on the mental response<sup>2</sup>. If nobody had ever had this kind of response, then the concept would not exist. However, this is not entailed by Johnston's definition. It seems quite consistent with his definition of response-dispositionality that there could be a concept of a disposition to produce some mental response that nobody has ever had. Consider, for instance, the concept of being bewitched. Presumably, no one has ever actually been bewitched, yet we can easily have a concept of it. Or suppose we had a concept of a disposition to produce an after-death experience which we imagined to be an essentially mental response. These are both concepts of "a disposition to produce a mental response in a certain subject or group of subjects under some specified conditions" and thus qualify as response-dispositional on Johnston's definition.

An account of response-dependence that I find more helpful for distinguishing between different kinds of properties is Ralph Wedgwood's (1998): "A property counts as response-dependent if, and only if, it is part of what it is for something to have the property that it stands in a certain relation

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<sup>2</sup> In this case, the dependence seems causal: the concept's existence is causally dependent on the occurrence of the response. However, causal dependence is not the kind of dependence I consider most important for my account, as will become clear later.

to a certain mental response to that property” (p. 36), and further on: ““I propose that a property is response-dependent just in case any adequate constitutive account of what it is for something to have the property must mention some type of mental response to that property” (p. 41). A constitutive account, he says, is an account that answers the question of why an object has the property in question, of what constitutes the object’s having the property, in what it consists, what makes it the case that it has the property or in virtue of what it is true that it does.

Wedgwood’s response-dependent properties are what I call *truly* response-dependent. That is, for such a property to be instantiated, the associated response must occur. It is not enough for the response to have occurred at one time or another (i.e. this is not about causal dependence); the response must be occurring while the property is being instantiated. This makes it a promising candidate for the kind of subjective properties I am seeking. If a property’s instantiation is dependent for its instantiation on a certain mental response, it is mind-dependent in the sense relevant for my search.

In order to clarify what it is that makes some, but not all, properties truly response-dependent, I consider the distinction between rigid and non-rigid response-dependent terms. It has been suggested that rigid or rigidified response-dependent accounts are accounts of objective properties while the non-rigid accounts are of subjective properties. I first consider Peter Vallentyne’s<sup>3</sup> account which is presented as analogous with Kripke’s<sup>4</sup> account of designation; something I argue does not work if the idea is to distinguish

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<sup>3</sup> Vallentyne (1996).

<sup>4</sup> Kripke (1980).

between two kinds of properties. On Kripke's account, a rigid and a non-rigid designator can refer to the same object; he distinguishes between two kinds of terms, but not between two kinds of objects or substances. It is unclear how an analogous account for property terms is supposed to yield something ontological about different kinds of properties. I next examine Nick Zangwill's<sup>5</sup> account which appears to be one of intrinsic and extrinsic dispositions rather than of rigidity.

A more useful account is presented by Peter Railton<sup>6</sup>. He speaks of properties being rigidified or non-rigidified. Rigidified response-dependent properties are such that their definition is fixed to the actual responses in the actual world. Such properties are not subjective in the sense I need. On the other hand, non-rigidified response-dependent properties come out as truly response-dependent, or subjective, in my sense. I then go on to discussing how world-relativity and subject-relativity can be used in an account of mind-dependent or subjective properties. I also argue that response-dependence with an element of what I call "because-I-say-so" can be used in such an account.

#### **1.4. On Two Challenges**

In Chapter 4, I consider two potential threats to a distinction between subjective and objective properties. Roughly speaking, one is the view that all

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<sup>5</sup> Zangwill (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Railton (1998).

properties are objective, and the other is that all properties are subjective. I argue that neither view poses a serious threat to my distinction.

According to the first challenge, it takes the possibility of faultless disagreement about a property to make it subjective. If a property  $p$  is subjective, it means that subjects  $A$  and  $B$  can disagree about whether  $p$  is instantiated, yet both be right. For this to be possible, it must be the case that the truth about  $p$ 's instantiation is somehow relative or that facts about  $p$ 's instantiation are relative or subjective. If truth or facts cannot be relative or subjective, there cannot be faultless disagreement, and thus no subjective properties.

A version of this view is put forth by Gideon Rosen (1994). He argues that the notion of mind-dependence does not apply to any properties, and therefore there is only one kind of properties: objective. At the core of his argument is the claim that a subjective property is one about which there are subjective facts. He then goes through a list of candidates for such properties and finds that all the facts about them are objective. He thereby concludes that there is no class of subjective properties.

I argue that Rosen does not consider the most plausible candidates for properties about which facts might be subjective. Furthermore, I argue that there is another way to account for subjective properties than through relying on subjective facts and faultless disagreement. Rosen seems to treat most of his property candidates as index-relative, i.e. rather than considering whether something is funny *simpliciter*, he sticks to discussing properties such as funny-to-Jane. While it is true that there does not seem to be anything subjective or relative about the fact that something is funny to Jane at this moment, I think many of us prefer to be able to speak of funniness (and other

properties) from a more general perspective. And if we ask not about Jane's opinion at the moment but more generally whether a joke is funny, there seems to be some room for saying that it depends on what we think of it. I consider two options in this respect. One is that we take facts about the instantiation of funniness *simpliciter* to be relative or subjective, which makes funniness a subjective property. If we do not like the idea of relative or subjective facts, we may say that there are no facts about the instantiation of funniness *simpliciter*. What makes funniness a subjective property, then, is that the only facts about its instantiation are index-relative, i.e. relative to a subject.

The second challenge to the distinction under examination is universal subjectivism: the view that all properties are subjective, perhaps because the world has no structure independently of how we think of it. This view does not in and of itself concern property instantiation, which is my focus, but property existence. I consider some forms of it and argue that only their most extreme versions, those that reject any kind of objective features of the world, entail subjectivism about property instantiation. I argue that the things that seem appealing about subjectivism are retained in its weaker versions

### **1.5. Are Sensory Properties Subjective or Objective?**

In the fifth chapter, I argue that some properties, including sensory properties, are partly subjective and partly objective. Instead of a clear distinction between subjective and objective properties, we should consider a continuum, ranging from *entirely objective* to *entirely subjective*.

In developing this account, I use color as an example. While I disagree with both color primitivism and error theories about color, I believe such theories reflect something that is important to consider. Namely, that we seem to want to think of color both as subjective and as objective.

According to primitivism about color<sup>7</sup>, colors are intrinsic, mind-independent properties of objects around us that perfectly resemble the way they are phenomenologically presented to us in color vision. I argue that there is an inconsistency involved in primitivism: a property cannot at the same time be mind-independent (and thereby externally determined) and guaranteed to be in perfect accord with a mental response (which suggests it is internally determined). If there are properties that are perfect resemblances of our mental responses to them, they must be subjective.

Error theorists about color<sup>8</sup> share the first part of the story with color primitivists: that we believe that colors are intrinsic, mind-independent properties of objects around us that perfectly resemble the way they are phenomenologically presented to us in color vision. The second part is different; according to error theorists, our beliefs about color are systematically false. There are no properties in the objects around us that correspond to the colors as we think of them. While I agree that objects do not have mind-independent properties that are exactly like colors as phenomenologically presented to us, I think the error theorists are wrong on both counts. Even though no properties are exactly like what is presented to us in color vision, there can be properties that correspond well enough to our experiences to

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Campbell (1993) and McGinn (1996).

<sup>8</sup> An example of such a view can be found in Boghossian and Velleman (1989).

count as the colors. Furthermore, I strongly doubt that our beliefs about the nature of colors are as error theorists and primitivists take them to be.

Even though color primitivists and error theorists are wrong, I think their views suggest something important: that our visual experiences of colors and their phenomenology play an important role in telling us what the colors are, i.e. in forming our color concepts. This brings us back to the notion of response-dependent concepts. The point is that whatever, say, blueness is, it cannot possibly be something that is not (generally) visible to us, or not (generally) a cause of our experiences of blueness. A property that is not behind those phenomenological experiences of ours has to be something other than blueness. At the same time, we are strongly inclined to think of colors as properties of the world as it is independently of us.

A possible solution to this apparently contradictory view we have of colors is to consider our color terms as having multiple meanings; a so-called dual or multiple reference theory. According to such a theory, the term 'blue' does not always refer to the same thing and we may switch between those different meanings without giving it much thought. I claim that while a multiple reference theory solves some of the problems involved in our use of color terms, it does not solve all of them. An account on which colors are to some extent subjective and to some extent objective at the same time works better.

An example of a case that is best explained with my account is variation in color perception or the case of "true blue"<sup>9</sup>. Among normal human perceivers there is some variation as to which shade of blue is seen as *true* blue. If asked to select a color chip with the shade closest to true blue, one person may select a chip that the next will consider slightly greenish or slightly

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<sup>9</sup> A discussion of the true blue case can for example be found in Tye (2006).

reddish. The intuition seems to be to say that none of these people is wrong about the chip's color, i.e. that it is subjective whether the color property instantiated in the chip is true blue, greenish blue or reddish blue. On the other hand, we do not consider it a subjective matter whether the color property instantiated is blue or red. If one person says the chip is blue and another that it is bright red, at least one of them must be wrong. Someone who sees a bluish color chip as red must be misperceiving or in some way very wrong about colors.

My solution to this is that there is a limited range of eligible candidates for true blueness, and that whether an object has features within this range is an objective matter. On the other hand, the choice between those features is a subjective matter. The range of eligible candidate for true blue shares quite a bit with the range of eligible candidates for greenish blue whereas it shares nothing with the range of eligible candidates for bright red.

I claim that many of the properties frequently considered subjective have an objective element. Examples of such properties are funniness and beauty. While it can be subjective whether one joke is funnier than another or which flower is more beautiful than another, it is possible to be wrong about funniness and beauty as well. Someone who finds the death of a loved one funny or a massacre beautiful must either be in error about the meaning of those terms or have something wrong with her evaluation process. The death of a loved one is not in the range of eligible candidates for funniness and a massacre is not in the range of eligible candidates for beauty.

After the discussion of color, I argue that we have good reasons to think that what holds for color in the respect described above is true for all sensory properties. What makes it so that colors are both subjective and objective also



holds for other sensory properties. For all of these properties, we have concepts that allude to the sensation we have when we perceive them. And they all share that they are properties that we perceive with our senses in order to gather information about the world around us.

It has been argued that there are some fundamental differences between our sense modalities with respect to how they work and how they present the world to us. I argue that while there are differences, they do not seem fundamental, and that when it comes to presenting the world to us, different sense modalities seem to work together, which suggests that they are consistent with each other in their presentation. I support this with findings from recent research in neuropsychology.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **ON OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE PROPERTIES**

#### **2.1. A Distinction between Two Kinds of Properties**

We frequently see distinctions made between the subjective and the objective. These distinctions can be metaphysical, epistemological, and perhaps even something we could call methodological. While they differ in many ways, they share one feature: that which is subjective, rumor has it, is mind-dependent in some significant sense in which the objective is not.

The main goal of my project is to find a metaphysically significant distinction between subjective and objective properties. Can such a distinction be made for properties and do properties of the corresponding two categories actually exist? Is such a distinction an interesting one from an ontological point of view? It becomes clear, when the relevant literature is examined, that the criteria for determining whether a property falls into the subjective or the objective category vary widely. One person's use of the term 'subjective property' may differ vastly from another's. Obviously, whatever distinction I will come up with cannot be consistent with all the different ways of making such a distinction. The distinction that interests me is one according to which some properties are such that our thinking that a thing has the property in question is what makes it so that it does, whereas some other properties are such that whether a thing has the property is not dependent on what we think. In other words, the instantiation of one of the kinds of properties should be mind-dependent in some way in which the other is not. The ways in which properties

may or may not exist is not my primary concern. I will assume that there are properties and that we can meaningfully speak of their instantiation. My concern is to find a way to distinguish between properties that are subjectively and objectively instantiated.

So-called sensory properties are among those disputed in this respect, and of recent, colors most famously so. While some claim they are obviously subjective, others claim they are obviously objective. Then there are those who claim that we can go either way with sensory properties or that nothing is obvious in the matter. Another goal of my project is to establish a subjective/objective distinction that helps clarify the status of sensory properties. Are the properties that we perceive with our five senses properties of the objects, independent of us, or is their instantiation mind-dependent, and if so, in what sense?

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of some of the relevant background issues. First, I will give a brief account of the distinction between the subjective and the objective from a general perspective. Then I will describe some accounts that have been given of the distinction between subjective and objective properties, most of which seem unsatisfactory as bases for an ontological distinction. Finally, I will briefly discuss where to go next.

## **2.2. Objectivity and Subjectivity**

In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, René Descartes (1986) makes a distinction between formal reality and objective reality. Something that has

objective reality only exists as an idea. The word *objective* refers to something that exists within a mind, the *object* of thought. This objective idea can, however, be caused by something that has *formal* reality, i.e. exists outside of the mind. This is consistent with the medieval use of the terms *objective* and *subjective*, where 'subjective' referred to that which actually existed in a subject or substance and 'objective' to that which existed as an object of thought (Daston 1992). Another explanation of the verbs *subiicio* and *obiicio* is that while *subiicio* refers to the logical discernment of the intellect, *obiicio* refers to the investigative activity of the senses. According to that use: "[a] subject is what accidents subject to and is grasped by the intellect. An object is what one looks at and is felt by the senses" (Pozzo 2003, p. 5).

Over time, the use of the terms objective and subjective has been more or less reversed, changing, as it appears, in the 18th and 19th centuries. Furthermore, while the meanings of the terms seem to have been strictly ontological in the Middle Ages and first thereafter, a much wider use was later adopted. Now we have subjective and objective judgments, methods, procedures, manners, as well as things and properties. In the words of Lorraine Daston about the term 'objectivity':

Current usage allows us to apply the word [objective] as an approximate synonym for the empirical (or, more narrowly, the factual); for the scientific, in the sense of public, empirically reliable knowledge; for impartiality-unto-self-effacement and the cold-blooded restraint of the emotions; for the rational, in the sense of compelling assent from all rational minds, be they lodged in human, Martian, or angelic bodies; and for the "really real," that is to say, objects in themselves independent of all minds except, perhaps, that of God (Daston 1992, pp. 597-598).

This aggregate of applications certainly has a hodgepodge appearance. What does an object existing unperceived have in common with scientific

methods or impartiality of judges? While these different senses seem diverse, I do believe there is a common thread to be found. In all cases, the subjective is considered to be dependent on the mind of a subject in some sense in which the objective is not. That sense, however, is not always the same. For instance, a subjective judgment is based on partiality, or dependence on certain emotions, while an objective judgment is supposed to be impartial or independent of emotions. An objective judgment is obviously not independent of all mental activity. Objective *things* on the other hand, in the ontological sense, are supposed to have the ability to exist independently of anyone's mental activity, whereas subjective things are dependent on certain mental activities. So while both distinctions are based on a contrast between mind-dependence and mind-independence, the relevant kinds of mind-dependence differ vastly.

While what we can call "everyday" use of the words 'objective' and 'subjective' may somewhat differ from the philosophical use, perhaps mainly because in everyday use of language people are less concerned with applying terms consistently and accurately. The everyday use of these words is worth some consideration. I asked a few people untrained in philosophy to explain the two words under discussion and these are the results:

Objective: "Gas is \$1.99 per gallon." Subjective: "Gas is expensive!" (compared to a year ago), "Gas is cheap!" (compared to what it is in other countries).

As an engineer, I consider 'objective' to be anything to which you can attach a number. 'Subjective' is anything that is a matter of opinion. Example: a root canal is painful and uncomfortable (objective). HOW painful is subjective.

I consider an opinion subjective when it is likely to be influenced by the many other things by which the person whose opinion it is is affected. It's subjective when it's affectable to a greater or lesser extent by any other factor.

An objective view would be one dictated by proven or provable facts and not open, or much less open, to an individual's own spin. Another way of looking at it, for me: a subjective view is the view from down here, looking up through it - whatever it is. An objective view would be the view from up there, looking down on it - whatever it is. This probably isn't clear or helpful but it kind of illustrates the weight of the subjective view; all that clogging weight that hampers clarity.

Objective = impartial, not swayed by bias or opinion. Subjective = partial; more a matter of opinion (can be based on facts). can be swayed by personal experience, opinion, etc.

I had a meeting tonight in G'ville and on the way home we were discussing odd clients/cities. A colleague was doing the comp plan for the town of Palm Beach. They did a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) exercise. Under strengths one of the residents said 'affordable housing'. The facilitator said "I'm sorry, did you say affordable housing?"..."Why yes, this is by far my most affordable property. My houses in Cannes, Monaco, Kennebunkport, Paris, and London are far more costly." It's all relative...or subjective, as the case may be.

Almost all of what I do [urban planning] is subjective. I may base my conclusions on a series of data and statistics, but much of that data is open to interpretation.

One thing I find striking about these examples is how frequently 'subjective' and 'relative' are used as synonyms. Philosophically speaking, it is hardly in order to conflate the two terms. That is, we need to be able to speak of relativity that has nothing to do with mind-dependence. However, as I will explain later, the idea of subjectivity seems related to the idea of relativity. Another interesting description is the last one, according to which the subjective is "open to interpretation". It suggests that while the objective (the data and statistics) is something outside of our reach, the subjective is something over which we have more power. While I find it necessary for my project to distinguish between terms such as 'relative', 'subjective' and 'open to interpretation', I believe there is something essential involved in the above

intuitions that should be retained in a distinction between the subjective and the objective.

The examples above about gas and real estate prices seem to be examples of relativity, at least in the way they are formulated. Saying that gas is expensive compared to last year is not much different from pointing out that the price this year is higher than the price last year. It is expensive relative to last year's gas prices and no mind-dependence is involved. But what about the following example?

Elinor and Marianne live in the same area and have similar incomes. Elinor frequently indulges in gourmet cheeses, but Marianne never does because she finds gourmet cheese too expensive. Marianne always buys Top-Notch ice cream, because it tastes so much better than the other brands; Elinor never buys it because she finds it too expensive. This is not an example of price in one place being higher or lower than somewhere else. In this case, the term 'expensive' seems to be applied on the basis of a value judgment. The reason why Elinor thinks Top-Notch ice cream is expensive, and Marianne apparently does not, and vice versa with gourmet cheese, has something to do with how Elinor and Marianne value these food types (let us suppose that the nutritional value of gourmet cheese and Top-Notch ice cream is about the same). Perhaps it is ultimately a matter of differences in their taste buds. At any rate, the application of the term 'expensive' is here based on something regarding how Elinor and Marianne *feel* about cheese and ice cream, their experiences when eating these foods, their desires for them, or their thoughts about what is important in their lives.

This example suggests that the term 'expensive' refers to something that can be dependent on what someone thinks, or the way she feels about

something, and perhaps what we could call mind-dependent; an example comparing gas prices in different countries and/or times just does not happen to be the right way to illustrate it. On the distinction between subjective and objective properties that I want to outline, the instantiation of subjective properties should be relative to some mental activity to which instantiation of the objective properties is not. Hence, we could say that if we apply philosophical standards of consistency and accuracy to the everyday notion of subjectivity, the layperson is sometimes guilty of a scope confusion: Even though the subjective may always be relative, the relative is certainly not always subjective.<sup>10</sup> This does not mean that we *should* apply philosophical standards to the everyday use of the term or that the layperson should be using these terms differently. On the contrary, my point is that while looking to the everyday use of the terms can be useful for the philosopher's information gathering, this everyday use need not be taken too literally.

Even though it does not appear in the examples I collected from "laypeople," the terms 'subjective' and 'arbitrary' are sometimes used synonymously in everyday speech. The same decision may, for instance, be interchangeably called arbitrary and subjective. Again, I believe there are scope issues at play here. An arbitrary decision is a decision based on something that is not substantial; a case when a different decision would have been just as good<sup>11</sup>. Sometimes, such a decision is based on something that seems undeniably subjective (such as an emotion), but sometimes it is based

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<sup>10</sup> I will discuss the relation between subjectivity and relativity in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>11</sup> It is not a necessary requirement for the arbitrariness of a decision that another decision would actually have been just as good. What matters is the information available to the person making the decision and her evaluation of the options. If, given what she knows, the different options seem equally good and/or desirable to the decision-maker, then a choice between them will be arbitrary.



on something random (such as the result of the flipping of a coin) that is not mind-dependent. So while the arbitrary is sometimes subjective and the subjective is sometimes arbitrary, neither extension is a subset of the other. An acceptable distinction between subjective and objective properties must account for this.

Let us now narrow our focus to subjective and objective properties. It is not always obvious what kind of mind-dependence it is that makes a property subjective. Sometimes it may be appropriate to make a distinction with respect to certain things that may be useless for distinctions needed at other times. One downside, of course, is the confusion that sometimes results from the lack of indication of *which* particular kind of mind-dependence is playing the key role in someone's use of the terms *subjective* and *objective*.

Messy terminology is not the only issue at play here. There are also some genuine disagreements concerning the status of some properties as objective or subjective. While most consider a property such as triangularity objective, there are certain groups of properties that we could call the disputed ones. Sensory properties such as colors are a prime example of properties disputed in this respect. Other disputed groups of properties include moral properties and aesthetic properties. My focus here will be on sensory properties. In order to come to a conclusion about whether sensory properties can be considered objective, it is necessary to discuss some of the attempts that have been made toward a distinction between objective and subjective properties and try to make sense of in what these accounts differ, and whether or how each of them can be useful.

Another reason for different ways of making the distinction is that there are many different ways in which one thing can depend on another. My

children are historically and causally dependent on me: had I never existed then neither would they. But they are also dependent on me in various ways that have nothing to do with how they came to exist; for instance they are both financially and emotionally dependent on me. Similar things can be said of the properties of things. Suppose I draw a triangle on a piece of paper. If we now focus on the figure on the piece of paper, there is a sense in which we can say that its being triangular is mind-dependent. Had I decided to draw the figure differently, it would not have been triangular. The figure's triangularity is then causally dependent on some mental activities of mine. There is also a sense in which any property of a mind is mind-dependent as it must be dependent for its instantiation on the thing in which it is instantiated. And then there are various senses in which any properties somehow associated with minds or something mental are mind-dependent.

The account I want should involve a particular way of distinguishing between mind-dependent and mind-independent properties; one that yields two ontologically significant categories of properties. More specifically, the mind-dependent properties I have in mind are those that are dependent for their instantiation on someone thinking (in a loose sense of 'thinking') that they are instantiated. The mind-independent, or objective, properties are those instantiated independently of what anyone thinks. For this purpose, I will now discuss a few attempts at making a distinction between subjective and objective properties, and their merits and flaws given my goal.

## 2.3. Primary and Secondary Qualities

No overview of accounts of different kinds of properties can neglect the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, so famously described by John Locke:

Qualities thus considered in bodies are,

First, such as are utterly inseparable from the body, in what state soever it be; and such as in all the alterations and changes it suffers, all the force can be used upon it, it constantly keeps; and such as sense constantly finds in every particle of matter which has bulk enough to be perceived; and the mind finds inseparable from every particle of matter, though less than to make itself singly be perceived by our senses ... These I call original or primary qualities of body, which I think we may observe to produce simple ideas in us, viz. solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number...

Secondly, such qualities which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but power to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities, i.e. by the bulk, figure, texture, and motion of their insensible parts, as colours, sounds, tastes, &c. These I call secondary qualities (Locke 1975, II, viii, 9-10).

Interpretations of Locke's words vary. Many take his secondary qualities to be dispositions; others have read him as an error theorist about secondary qualities<sup>12</sup>. While there are some who think of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities as conceptual only<sup>13</sup>, I will focus here on metaphysical interpretations of it. Let us assume that Locke's view is that things possess their primary qualities independently of our mental activities, and that the instantiation of secondary qualities is mind-dependent. This is an interpretation that many take for granted. In fact, many philosophers seem to assume that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is synonymous with a distinction between objective and subjective properties.

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<sup>12</sup> Mackie 1976; Alexander 1977.

<sup>13</sup> An example of such a reading can be found in A.D. Smith 1990.

Assuming that this is how Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities goes, can it be the distinction for which I am looking? Let us suppose, to begin with, that the primary qualities are some kind of basic, first-order properties, and that the secondary qualities are dispositions to produce certain sensations in us. Among Locke's examples of the primary qualities are shape and size, whereas properties such as color and taste are meant to be secondary qualities.<sup>14</sup> If this distinction is supposed to make primary qualities objective and secondary qualities subjective, the idea must be that an object's size (a primary quality according to Locke) is independent of our mental states: it is 5 cm long no matter how long we think it is. But its disposition to produce, say, sensations of redness in us (the same property as redness, on this interpretation of Locke) is somehow dependent on our thinking. Is this really the case?

The idea that a property such as the size or shape of an object is independent of how we think it is does not seem problematic (unless we are ready to adopt some kind of universal subjectivism, which I do not think we should be at this point). My doubts concern the other category. Why should being dispositions of a particular sort make secondary qualities subjective or mind-dependent?<sup>15</sup>

Simply being a disposition does not make a property subjective. The most common examples of dispositions, such as fragility and flammability, can hardly be considered mind-dependent. Hence, the reason why someone would think of dispositional secondary qualities as subjective must have to do

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<sup>14</sup> I am not making a judgment as to whether color, taste or other properties really *are* dispositional. Let us assume for now that they could be.

<sup>15</sup> The assumption that dispositions to produce subjective reactions are subjective can be found, for instance, in Campbell (1993) and in Jackson and Pargetter (1987).

with what they are dispositions for, since it cannot be simply that they are dispositions. So presumably, secondary qualities are subjective because they produce subjective responses. Rose scent, for instance, is mind-dependent on this view because it is a disposition to produce a rose-scent sensation in human perceivers.

But remember what it is that makes a property subjective in the sense I am considering: It is subjective if its instantiation in an object is mind-dependent, i.e. that its being instantiated is somehow dependent on a subject's thinking that it is. If this is supposed to be true in the case of dispositions to cause subjective responses in human subjects, it must mean that a certain rose's having the disposition to produce a rose-scent sensation is dependent on someone's thinking that it has the disposition to produce a rose-scent sensation. But is the rose's disposition really mind-dependent in that way? Perhaps it is, but that does by no means follow from its being a disposition to produce a subjective response. It seems possible to think of a rose's having such a disposition even though it is growing somewhere far away where nobody can ever smell it or even have any thoughts about it as no one knows of its existence. It can still be true that the rose has that disposition because *if* someone were to find it and smell it she would have a rose-scent sensation.

Let us consider a disposition that accompanies one of the primary properties: We can reasonably claim that a rock that weighs 100 kg has a disposition to produce a sensation of heaviness in most human subjects who try to carry it. The rock has this disposition in virtue of its mass (a primary property) as well as some facts about human size and anatomy. These facts remain the same whether or not anyone ever tries to carry this rock or has any

thoughts about whether it is likely to feel heavy. Hence, there is no reason to think of the rock's having this disposition as dependent on a subject's thinking it does. The same can hold in the case of the rose's fragrance. If the rose has its disposition to produce a certain smell sensation in virtue of, say, its containing a certain substance as well as some facts about human anatomy, then there is no more reason to think of the instantiation of the disposition as mind-dependent than there is to think of the rock's disposition's to feel heavy as mind-dependent.

I could modify my account to include properties whose instantiation is dependent on the occurrence of a particular subjective response, even though it is some response different from thinking that the object in question has the given property. That is, we might want to call heaviness subjective if its instantiation in the 100 kg rock were dependent on our having a heaviness-sensation, even though it is not dependent on our thinking that the rock has the disposition to produce a heaviness-sensation. But this is not the case. Of course the rock can have the disposition to cause a heaviness-sensation even though nobody ever tries to lift it, i.e. the disposition can be instantiated even though the associated subjective response never occurs.

In many cases, dispositions are never manifested, such as in the case of the rose that grows far away from anyone with a functioning sense of smell. How could that rose's disposition to produce a rose-scent sensation be dependent on someone's having a rose-scent response to it or thinking any thoughts about it if such a response to it never occurs? It implies that the disposition is not instantiated unless it is manifested, which is hardly a desirable result. The upshot is that if rose scent and other secondary qualities are subjective (which is at least possible), it is not because they are

dispositions of some kind or other. There must be some other reason for their subjectivity.

Now, let us instead assume an error theoretic interpretation of the primary/secondary quality distinction. According to that version, the primary qualities are actually inherent in the objects, whereas the secondary qualities merely exist as ideas in our minds, and we somehow (falsely) project them onto the objects. The objects do not have the secondary qualities at all. The distinction becomes one between properties that the objects really have and imaginary properties that they do not have.

An obvious concern regarding this version is that I am looking for a distinction between two kinds of properties that things really do have. Are the only possible subjective properties not real; properties that do not exist (or exist only in our minds) and are falsely projected by us onto the objects? That hardly sounds like a distinction between two kinds of properties; while the objective properties exist, the “subjective properties” are not really properties so we end up with properties on one side and non-properties on the other. At best, the subjective properties will be properties of, say, our minds instead of properties of the objects of our perception. But if so, will they be different in kind from the primary properties? That is by no means clear, and many error theorists even seem to assume that we think of these secondary qualities exactly like primary qualities.

My goal is to find a distinction between two different kinds of properties that something actually has. The idea is that object *A* has objective property *po* independently of our thinking and that it has subjective property *ps* because we think it does, or at least because of our having some sort of subjective

response to it. For that to make sense, *A* must actually have both these properties.

Despite the failure of the two versions of the primary/secondary quality distinction that I have outlined above, it is possible to draw this distinction in a way that would satisfy my goal. And indeed, many philosophers have thought of the primary/secondary distinction as synonymous with a metaphysical objective/subjective distinction. However, since there seem to be many ways to draw each distinction, it is by no means guaranteed that they are synonymous. So while the distinction that I am looking for between subjective and objective properties might be the same categorization as *some* would call the primary/secondary distinction, it may be a different distinction than what others have in mind when they speak of primary and secondary qualities. I believe the words *subjective* and *objective* come closer to describing the two types of properties that I want to describe than *primary* and *secondary* do. In any case, whether the distinction is called objective/subjective or primary/secondary, we will need a more adequate description of it.

## **2.4. The Appearance-Reality Distinction**

One attempt to distinguish between objective and subjective properties consists in using a distinction between appearance and reality as a test. The idea is that in the case of something objective, something can *appear* to us differently from the way it *really* is, whereas for the subjective, appearance *is* reality. Hence, when dealing with the objective, a distinction between appearance and reality is in place while such a distinction does not apply to



the subjective. For instance, I might be in my house at night and it could appear to me that a mouse just ran by. However, the reality might be that the creature that ran by was a small rat, or a hamster escaped from next door, or this could be a moving shadow. This would be an example of a difference between appearance and reality. But I cannot be wrong about the fact that it *appears* to me that a mouse just ran by, or that I have a headache, or that I like licorice.<sup>16</sup>

The examples above regard facts; on the one hand facts about objectively existing things (rodents, in this case) and events concerning them, and on the other hand facts about subjective things such as mental states (pains and likings of a subject). We can apply an appearance/reality distinction in a similar manner to objects themselves instead of applying it to facts about them: Whether a mouse *really* exists is independent of whether it *appears* to us that it exists. My headache, however, seems to exist if and only if it appears to me that I have a headache—or at least such a claim is plausible.

Can an appearance/reality distinction help us distinguish between objective and subjective *properties* in the same way? If so, we should be able to find out whether a property is objective or subjective by running it through an appearance/reality test: If we can make an appearance/reality distinction for it, it is objective; if we cannot make such a distinction, it is subjective.

Kathleen Akins and Martin Hahn (2000) suggest this distinction as a criterion for the objectivity of a property:

...we should treat color as we would any other putatively objective property by asking whether it conforms to an appearance/reality distinction. As we said above, if color is

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<sup>16</sup> To be perfectly safe here, I should probably say that I cannot be wrong that I have something I believe to be a headache and that I like what I take to be licorice, as I could be mistaken about what headaches and licorice are.

objective, then we must be able to draw a distinction between our representations of color properties and color properties themselves, a distinction which we must be able to make under all circumstances...(pp. 238-239).

The idea is that if we make a distinction between something's appearing to have the property and something's actually having it, the property qualifies as objective. If a property is subjective, on the other hand, we do not make such a distinction. Possessing the property and appearing to possess it are the same thing.

This does not seem too bad. Surely, if objectivity corresponds to mind-independence, then it seems that whatever is objective must be something about which we can be mistaken. It is the way it is independently of what we know or believe about it; therefore error must be possible. On the other hand, if we are by definition always right about the instantiation of a property, it could be because it is dependent on whatever we think or judge about it, i.e. it could be mind-dependent or subjective.

Now, one problem regarding this way of making the distinction is that we sometimes make an appearance/reality distinction for properties that are frequently considered paradigm subjective properties. "First, I thought the joke was funny, but after thinking more about it, I realized that it was not funny at all." One possible response to this is of course to say that these properties may be objective after all, and that using them as paradigm subjective properties is highly misleading. That is certainly an option, but let us leave it aside for the moment and get back to it later.

We are less likely to make a distinction between appearing funny and actually being funny than we are to make a distinction between appearing and actually being 2 meters long. If Kitty thinks a joke is funny and Lydia thinks it is

not, we *usually* do not conclude that one of them must be wrong. On the other hand, if Kitty claims that the height of the front door of her house is exactly 2 meters and Lydia claims that the same door is 2 meters and 20 centimeters, we conclude that at least one of them must be wrong. This suggests that a distinction between the appearance and reality is sharper or stronger for at least some of the properties generally considered objective than it is for some of the properties generally considered subjective, even though it is not entirely absent for the so-called subjective properties. Even though we usually do not conclude that people's different reactions to a joke mean that one of them is mistaken, there are some cases where we might. There are things that we consider too sad, offensive, dangerous or disgusting to be funny. If someone finds the loss of a loved one or the actions of a mass murderer funny, we will very likely consider her to be wrong. These things just are not funny. Thus, while an appearance/reality distinction certainly seems relevant to a distinction between objective and subjective properties, it can hardly be the only basis for dividing properties into subjective and objective unless we review our basis for that distinction.

As I already mentioned, it could be the case that the "paradigm" subjective properties are in fact objective and that instead there are other properties that qualify as the subjective properties. That is, if the appearance/reality criterion is to be taken seriously, we might want to say that properties that are subjective are those that fail it entirely. But are there any properties that do? I cannot think of any. From that, we could draw the conclusion that there are no subjective properties. We could also go in the other direction and say that a property that *never* fails the appearance/reality test is objective and all other properties are subjective. That seems like a more

fruitful interpretation as it seems more likely that there are properties that never fail the test than that there are properties that always fail it. That way, we get to keep both objective and subjective properties. If we always make an appearance/reality distinction for triangularity (which seems likely that we do, at least without further investigation), then triangularity is an objective property. And even if we sometimes make an appearance/reality distinction for beauty, in many cases we do not make the distinction, and that makes beauty a subjective property.

My main worry about this second option is that important nuances can be lost. It may not account for a possible difference between properties for which we almost always make an appearance/reality distinction and those for which we almost never make such a distinction. And it does not give an explanation of why we sometimes make an appearance/reality distinction and sometimes not for something that seems to be the same property in both cases. Perhaps this can all be solved and a usable account worked out from this as a basis.

Our third option is that subjectivity and objectivity of properties come in degrees. If so, a property for which we rarely make this distinction is more subjective than a property for which we make the distinction more frequently, which is then more objective. Suppose an appearance/reality distinction is more often appropriate for size than for beauty. In that case, we might say that size is more objective and less subjective than beauty. Instead of assigning a value of "subjective" or "objective" to each property we could assign it a place on an objectivity-subjectivity scale. Perhaps this is the best of our options.

John Campbell (1993) endorses a view similar to the appearance/reality view, which he calls "a simple theory of perception." He finds his simple theory preferable as a means to describe objectivity to the notion of an absolute or

objective description of reality (p. 260). According to the simple theory of perception, perception consists in two things: the way things are “anyway” and the perceiver’s meeting necessary conditions for perception. By employing this theory, we can think of objects as “being there anyway,” that is as being mind-independent. An objective property, on this view, is a property that a thing possesses “anyway.”

I do not see anything wrong with this kind of distinction and it seems consistent with making an appearance/reality distinction for the objective. After all, if an objective property is supposed to be mind-independent, we could just as well say that it is a property that is possessed by objects “anyway” or independently of our perceptions of it. In other words, a property being there “anyway” means that it is *really* there, regardless of whether it *appears* to be there. And the main idea behind mind-dependence or subjectivity is that it is supposed to be something produced by our minds. For some purposes, this way of cashing out the distinction may be all that is needed. However, since I am looking for an account that illuminates and explains a metaphysical distinction between objective and subjective properties, I find the Campbell-account inadequate. In virtue of what are some properties going to be there “anyway”? While this approach does make it clear that some kind of mind-dependence is involved in subjectivity, it does not involve an explanation of what kind of mind-dependence that is.

What we have learned here is that while the appearance/reality test may be of some help in distinguishing subjective from objective properties, it is not a handy tool we can use to divide properties quickly into two groups. A scale or a continuum may be where this matter is destined to end. While the kind of objective property for which I am looking must fulfill the appearance/reality

criterion, I would like to dig deeper into the reasons for why some properties fulfill this criterion better than others, and what it is that makes it so.

## 2.5. It's All About the Concepts

We ascribe properties to things on the basis of what we find worth saying or thinking about them. Assuming that properties can exist, and be possessed by objects independently of human thought, a property will still never get mentioned unless we humans direct our attention to it. Furthermore, our talk of properties is of course governed by our way of sorting things into groups, so that when we attribute some property to an object, we are also shedding light on our own system of classification. Hence, for any property that is mentioned, there must be at least one corresponding concept. That is, it is safe to assume that the only way to succeed in referring to a property when we speak lies through a concept corresponding to the property. Another way to put this is that if we think and speak of something as a property, it entails that we conceive of it as a property. Each of those who conceive of the property thereby have some kind of conception of it<sup>17</sup>. And for us to successfully refer to the same property as other speakers, there must be a concept of the property involved. How exactly the concept is derived is not a part of the story here; perhaps it is somehow a product of pooling different conceptions together,

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<sup>17</sup> I am assuming the following distinction between conceptions and concepts: A conception is something belonging to each subject. Anyone who conceives of *A* has a conception of *A*. A concept is something that at least on some theories can belong to a society or other form of aggregate of subjects in conjunction with other external factors. Hence, a conception is by definition internal; it is what the subject in question thinks about the object, whereas externalism about concepts is at least a meaningful view. If externalism is true, then I can have a false or flawed conception of some given concept.

perhaps it is defined by a group of experts, and so on. What matters here is that there is at least one concept in play for each property about which we think and talk.

I will be assuming a certain distinction between properties and concepts: a property resides in an object, as a state or as something characteristic of it, but a concept must reside in the mind of a subject (or the collection of minds of many subjects) and represents something other than itself, such as a property, object or event. Our concept of blue resides in our minds and represents the property 'blue' which resides in various objects (or which we at least attribute to the objects) . It is important to keep in mind that there can be more than one concept associated with each property and that we should not get our concepts mixed up with our properties:

There can be many different concepts of the same property. To mistake the requirements on a theory of a concept for requirements on a theory of a property, and vice versa, can lead to errors and spurious problems. The results of such a mistake are comparable to those that result in the singular case from confusing theories of modes of presentation with theories about the objects so presented (Peacocke 1992, p. 2).

Since the only epistemic access we have to properties is through concepts of them, it would seem that at least to some extent, the answer to whether a property is subjective or objective must lie in the concept. Some say that for a property to be subjective is simply for us to conceive of it as subjective. Such a view is, for example, endorsed by Brian McLaughlin:

It is concepts that are, in the first instance, subjective or objective, not properties. A property is subjective or objective only under a conceptualization, i.e. under a concept. The concepts under which properties count as objective differ in their a priori possession conditions from those under which properties count as subjective (McLaughlin 2003, p. 144).

On McLaughlin's account, a property is objective when it is represented by (or it "is under") an objective concept and the same property is subjective when represented by a subjective concept. A subjective concept, according to McLaughlin, is a concept that is introspective or is linked to an introspective concept. An objective concept is one that is not linked to an introspective concept:

Some concepts are such that full possession of them a priori requires being able to apply them directly in introspection. We may call such concepts 'introspective' concepts. The concept of pain is an introspective concept; and so is the concept of what it is like to see red. Introspective concepts are subjective concepts; but not all concepts that count as subjective are introspective concepts. Non-introspective concepts can be linked to introspective ones in the sense that full possession of a non-introspective concept can a priori require full possession of an introspective one. A concept can be more or less subjective depending on the extent and nature of its links to introspective concepts. A concept is wholly objective if and only if it is not linked to any introspective concept (Ibid.).

McLaughlin does not provide us with any examples of non-introspective concepts linked to introspective ones, or of any non-introspective concepts for that matter. Hence, it may not be entirely clear which concepts he has in mind. However, his general idea should come across here: Degrees of objectivity and subjectivity are possible depending on whether the concepts under which the properties are presented are linked to introspective concepts.

McLaughlin says he derives his view that properties can only be objective or subjective under a concept in part from Brian Loar (1990/7). On Loar's account, the same property can be described both under a subjective and an



objective mode of presentation. It is, however, not clear whether Loar thinks of this as an ontological distinction between different kinds of properties.<sup>18</sup>

Now, obviously, properties can be presented to us in different ways. If squareness is my favorite property, I can experience a certain kind of pleasure whenever I encounter square things or conceive of squareness in terms of some sensation or other that it causes in me. I can also conceive of it in mathematical terms; a mode of presentation that certainly seems objective if anything is. Funniness can be presented to me by its inducement of amusement in me. On the other hand, suppose I am feeling miserable and in no condition to appreciate funniness. I could still recognize funniness through other people's reactions to something said or even by knowing that I would feel amused by this joke if only I were feeling better.

In fact, it seems quite likely that this is true about all properties. McLaughlin, however, is not quite certain whether each and every property can be both subjective and objective in his sense: "While subjective concepts are distinct from wholly objective ones, it is at least an open question whether a property might be both subjective (even introspective) and wholly objective, subjective under one concept and wholly objective under another" (p. 144). This suggests that he may have something slightly different in mind than a property's having different kinds of possible modes of presentation. It could be, for instance, that he only wants to count concepts under which the property is *typically* conceived, suggesting that a subjective appreciation of squareness and funniness recognized via the laughter of others are ruled out as concepts

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<sup>18</sup> A related view can be found in McGinn 1983, "secondary qualities are subjective in the sense that experience enters into their analysis: to grasp the concept of red it is necessary to know what it is for something to look red" (p. 8) .

for squareness and funniness respectively. After all, a concept of a property does not include all its possible modes of presentation.

McLaughlin's way of making the distinction between subjective and objective properties is epistemically, rather than ontologically, based. In other words, his claims are really about the concepts and not about properties. However, McLaughlin claims that a distinction between subjective and objective properties can be made strictly on the basis of concepts; i.e. that an ontological distinction can be epistemically based in this way. I disagree. That what it takes for us to know, grasp or conceive of something is not what determines its ontological status. A view similar to mine here has been expressed by Stephen Yablo:

To call a property "subjective" is to comment in an ontological vein about what it is. But to say that it is not adequately *conceived* except (e.g.) in terms of how it makes things look is to applaud certain ways of *thinking* of the property. Unless standards of adequate conception are dictated *by the property and it alone*, no ontological conclusions follow (Yablo 1995, p. 491).

Yablo is pointing out that nothing about the ontological status of a property follows from claims about adequate conceptions of it. So a subjective conception of a property does not automatically make the property itself subjective. McLaughlin, on the other hand, claims that a property can only be subjective or objective under a concept and even considers the possibility of *all* properties being both subjective and objective. Hence, he cannot be claiming that ontological conclusions follow from the concepts or ways of thinking of the properties. The important issue here is that McLaughlin seems to be suggesting that there is no such thing as a subjective/objective distinction for properties; only for concepts. Maybe he is right, but we are

hardly ready to concede that yet. If we want to keep looking for an actual distinction between objective and subjective properties, we must at least look elsewhere before settling for this.

## 2.6. Another Epistemically Motivated Distinction

For another attempt at distinguishing between subjective and objective properties, let us consider what Alice Crary (2002) describes (and then challenges) as the traditional philosophical conception of objectivity:

...a property is objective—in the familiar sense that it can form the subject-matter of judgments to which no conclusive objections can be raised—if it excludes everything that counts as subjective by the lights of a traditional philosophical conception of subjectivity. According to the pertinent conception of subjectivity, subjective properties are properties such that no fully satisfactory conception can be formed of what it is for an object to possess them except in terms of the mental (i.e., perceptual and affective) responses the object elicits from subjects (p. 377).

This sounds quite similar to the account in the previous section according to which subjectivity was defined in terms of adequate conceptions. It does however seem strange that Crary considers it a familiar sense of an objective property that “it can form the subject-matter of judgments to which no conclusive objections can be raised.” Is that supposed to mean that *conclusive* objections can be raised against judgments about subjective properties? Why should the difference between subjective and objective properties lie in the possible objections to statements about them? I will not be focusing on this issue here but instead get on with her account:

Thus conceived, the class of subjective properties includes what might be described as *merely* subjective properties—properties an object can be said to possess just in so far as it in fact elicits a certain mental response from some subject (e.g., “seeming funny to me” or “appearing green to me”). It also includes what might be described as *marginally* subjective properties—properties an object can be said to possess in so far as it is the kind of thing that would elicit certain mental responses in appropriate circumstances. The set of marginally subjective properties comprises both affective properties like “humorousness” and also, given a fitting story about how, e.g., a thing’s “being green” cannot be properly understood apart from its having a tendency to seem green in suitable circumstances, perceptual properties like “green” (Ibid.).

It seems quite convincing that at least the merely subjective properties, and possibly the marginally subjective, as described, can only be adequately conceived in terms of mental responses of subjects, or at least that such a conception is our most common conception of such a property. If a property is such that an object can only possess it in virtue of a mental response of a subject, then surely a conception of it will involve that response. This is less clear in the case of marginally subjective properties, but it is probably true regarding the conception involved in the most commonly used concept of the property in question.

Now, what distinguishes this account from McLaughlin’s account from the previous section? The difference is that Cray assumes that the account she describes involves metaphysical claims about properties whereas McLaughlin considers the claims epistemic (even though he seems to think that ontological claims can be derived from them). In fact, she presents her paper as one about metaphysical issues concerning moral properties (p. 373) and the main goal of the paper is to argue against “the traditional philosophical conception of objectivity” in order to alleviate the metaphysical problems she claims arise

as its result. She argues that the properties she calls marginally subjective do not have to count as subjective in a metaphysical sense.

To sum things up, Crary's interpretation of the "traditional view" with a focus on properties is this: The class of subjective properties, those that require a conception in terms of mental responses of subjects, includes both so-called merely subjective and marginally subjective properties. They are subjective both in an epistemological and a metaphysical sense. Objective properties are those that are not subjective. In this, she seems to assume that epistemic subjectivity entails ontological subjectivity: the fact that it takes certain things to have a conception of a property somehow makes the property itself subjective.

Is there really a reason to think that this traditional view involves metaphysical claims about properties? If so, who would the proponents of such a view be? And if the view is intended as an epistemic one, is there a reason to think that it still entails something metaphysical? Crary attributes the traditional view, or what she also calls a "narrow conception of objectivity" to Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel, among others. Her claim is that their approaches to objectivity as a certain perspective on the world are among the strongest available defenses of the narrow conception.

In Williams's terms (Williams 1978), objectivity is associated with "an absolute conception of the world," while Nagel associates it with the "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986). A perfectly subjective description of the world is one that is entirely from the point of view of an individual, whereas a perfectly objective description is the exact opposite, i.e. one that is entirely removed from an individual's viewpoint. As we are all subjects and individuals, we cannot attain an objective point of view. Furthermore, as Nagel makes clear in

his paper "Subjective and Objective" (Nagel 1979), this distinction is not a clear-cut either/or distinction but more of a distinction along a continuum:

Although I shall speak of the subjective viewpoint and the objective viewpoint, this is just shorthand, for there are not two such viewpoints, nor even two such categories into which more particular viewpoints can be placed. Instead, there is a polarity. At one end is the point of view of a particular individual, having a specific constitution, situation, and relation to the rest of the world. From here the direction of movement toward greater objectivity involves, first, abstraction from the individual's specific spatial, temporal, and personal position in the world, then from the features that distinguish him from other humans, then gradually from the forms of perception and action characteristic of humans, and away from the narrow range of a human scale in space, time, and quantity, toward a conception of the world which as far as possible is not the view from anywhere within it. There is probably no end-point to this process, but its aim is to regard the world as centerless, with the viewer as just one of its contents (p. 206).

This distinction is epistemological: We think of two different ways of considering the world, from a subjective viewpoint and an objective one. Since references to subjective experience do not belong in the objective view, it is hardly going to include any conceptions of merely subjective properties. It might include alternative conceptions of marginally subjective properties. That is, it might include conceptions of properties that also happen to be dispositions to cause certain mental responses, but it will certainly not include a conception of a property as such a disposition.

Is there a reason to think that a metaphysical distinction between objective and subjective properties follows from this distinction between an objective and subjective viewpoint? Presumably, an objective property would be detected via the objective point of view and a subjective property via the subjective view. As Crary has already set things up, this holds for a certain kind of distinction between "objective" and "subjective" properties, but it is by

no means clear that this particular distinction is ontological. Is there an ontological distinction between properties that follows?

We can only try to imagine what an objective view of the world would be like; a view independent of any individual point of view. Perhaps it could be the viewpoint of an omniscient deity stripped of any references to mental responses of individuals. Presumably, it would include information about what things are like, including which properties they have, as well as hypothetical information about what things would be like if it were not for us subjects and thus the properties which depend on us. Why would properties that depend upon certain kinds of mental activity be excluded in this case? Couldn't this kind of view involve information about *all* properties? If so, an objective property defined as the kind of property about which an objective view informs us could be any property. That is, all properties would be objective. To avoid that conclusion, we will have to assume that certain properties, namely those that depend ontologically on mental responses, cannot be conceived of from an objective point of view, but only in terms of mental responses. There is no particular reason to think that is the case. In fact, there are some good reasons to think it is not.

Focusing on the other extreme, a subjective view, it seems quite likely that even a highly idiosyncratic, personal, subjective description is going to include properties that "would be there anyway." That is, even a subjective description might include mind-independent properties. To each of us, things appear in a whole lot of ways: pleasant, sweet, round, threatening, boring, concave, hot, cold, thought-provoking, etc. All these properties appear to us from a subjective point of view; whether the properties in question are objective or subjective seems to be a different matter.

But what about an *entirely* subjective view? A point of view according to which only the experiences of the subject are taken into account and nothing else? If we imagine a being with such a point of view, it makes sense to assume that she does not acknowledge anything that is mind-independent. She only views and considers the world in terms of how she is being affected or how she is feeling. Or does the entirely subjective view perhaps consist in only thinking of what she is feeling and not acknowledging things separate from herself at all?

An example of such a fictional being is Gareth Evans's Hero (Evans 1980), a being whose only functioning sense modality is the sense of hearing. Evans's claim is that because Hero does not possess what he calls simultaneous spatial concepts, he cannot conceive of existence unperceived, i.e. of mind-independent objects. Evans offers a couple of arguments for this claim; one is that Hero lacks the capacity to think of an objective causal ground for what he senses, and another is that he lacks the resources to form so-called simultaneous spatial concepts, i.e. concepts necessary for having an idea of different things existing simultaneously at different locations. The core idea is that Hero's limited ability to experience the world around him prevents him from conceiving of the world in terms that are not strictly subjective.

Evans's claim about Hero's inability to conceive of unperceived existence seems quite compelling. What seems most striking, if we try to imagine Hero's situation, is that Hero seems isolated from the rest of the world. If Hero cannot distinguish between his own perception of a sound and the sound perceived, it would seem that he was generally unable to make a distinction between himself and the rest of the world. Therefore, if this is a case of an absolutely subjective view, it is not really a view of *the world*. Is 'subjective conception of



the world' perhaps an oxymoron? And could someone like Hero even conceive of something like *properties*? This idea of an absolutely subjective view does not seem helpful for picking out a particular kind of property (i.e. subjective properties).

The conclusion is that an objective view does not seem particularly helpful for distinguishing between different types of properties, and that a subjective view, if it involves any property conception at all, might just as well inform us about the same properties as an objective view does. Hence, basing an ontological distinction between different kinds of properties on these two different points of view is not what we need. In other words, it is highly doubtful that an ontological distinction between objective and subjective properties follows from epistemological accounts such as Nagel's and Williams's of an absolute conception of the world or a view from nowhere. Furthermore, it is by no means clear that this is really the "traditional philosophical conception" of the distinction between subjective and objective properties.

## **2.7. What Now?**

So far, I have not reached any interesting conclusion about what makes a property objective or subjective. I have gone through a list of attempts at making a distinction between objective and subjective properties and found none of them satisfactory for my goal. The main problem with accounts such as those of McLaughlin and Cray is that they are epistemologically based. While there is nothing wrong in and of itself with distinguishing between properties on the basis of how we come to know about them or of how we

conceive of them, I am looking for a distinction that runs deeper from an ontological perspective. An epistemically based distinction does not provide the necessary tools for considering the *reality* or *instantiation* of the two kinds of properties different.

The shortcomings of the account given by Akins and Hahn are of a different nature. Their account does describe an ontological difference; a difference on the level of the instantiation of the properties. However, that is as far as it goes: description. I am looking for more of an *explanation*.

I have not yet mentioned what I think may be the most promising type of accounts: the response-dependence account of subjective properties. While such accounts can certainly be messy and confusing, I believe they can be used to throw light upon a viable distinction between subjective and objective properties. The next chapter will be dedicated to that.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE AND SUBJECTIVITY

#### 3.1. Response-Dependence

So-called response-dependence has by some been considered the solution to the gap between the subjective and the objective<sup>19</sup>. Among other things, it has been proposed that response-dependent properties are the paradigm subjective properties; i.e. that response-dependence is sufficient to make a property subjective.

As I am seeking an account that clarifies the distinction between subjective and objective properties, looking at accounts of response-dependence seems essential. Can the notion of response-dependence help me outline a distinction between subjective and objective properties?

In this chapter, I will argue that response-dependence understood in a certain way does yield subjectivity for properties. That does not mean that all response-dependence accounts are accounts of the “right” kind of dependence. The most difficult task is to spell out exactly in what the required response-dependence consists.

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<sup>19</sup> Examples include Wright 1992; Johnston 1993; Wedgwood 1998; Norris 2002a; Norris 2002b.

### 3.2. What Is Response-Dependence?

According to the legend, the term *response-dependence* was coined by Mark Johnston in a seminar at Princeton University in 1986 (Wright 1992).

Johnston's definition of response-dependence is as follows:

...a concept is response-dependent just in case it is either a response-dispositional concept or a truth-functional or quantificational combination of concepts with at least one non-redundant element being a response-dispositional concept (Johnston 1993, p. 104).

According to Johnston, a concept is response-dispositional if it is dispositional (concept  $F$  = the concept of the disposition to produce  $R$  in  $S$  under  $C$ ) and furthermore:

(i) the manifestation  $R$  is some response of subjects which essentially and intrinsically involves some mental process (responses like sweating and digesting are therefore excluded), (ii) the locus  $S$  of the manifestation is some subject or group of subjects, and (iii) the conditions  $C$  of manifestation are some specified conditions under which the specified subjects can respond in the specified manner. Moreover, we shall require (iv) that the relevant identity does not hold simply on trivializing 'whatever it takes' specifications of either  $R$  or  $S$  or  $C$  (Ibid.).

In short, a response-dispositional concept is a concept of a disposition to produce a mental response in a certain subject or group of subjects under some specified conditions. For example, *nauseating* and *tiresome* would be such concepts. Other response-dispositional concepts include color concepts and other perceptual or sensory concepts, concepts of pain and other emotions or experiences, and concepts of funniness and other evaluative concepts. Johnston's account is epistemological as it concerns the relation between our possession of certain concepts and certain mental responses.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Johnston discusses and endorses his view of response-dispositional properties in a number of papers, such as Johnston 1989; 1992; 1993; and 1998.

Johnston calls a concept *response-dependent* if it is a response-dispositional concept or “a truthfunctional or quantificational combination of concepts with at least one non-redundant element being a response-dispositional concept” (1993, p. 104). Quoted above, the term ‘response-dependent’ implies a dependence of the concept on a response. In what can this dependence consist? Does this mean that the concept is somehow dependent on the occurrence of the response in question? Let me note here that Johnston’s account is strictly about concepts and not about properties. As I am looking for an account of different kinds of *properties*, it is by no means clear that an account such as Johnston’s will be satisfactory for that purpose. However, as the notion of response-dependence owes so much to Johnston’s account, it is worth considering whether a basis for the distinction I want can be found in it.

Johnston’s definition of response-dispositional concepts quoted above does not in any obvious way imply that the concept is dependent on the response itself. But his use of the term ‘response-dependent’ might indicate that a less obvious dependence relation is supposed to follow from the definition. Let us consider some options:

Someone might think that response-dispositional concepts are the concepts we would not possess if it were not for some specific mental response of ours, such that each of those concepts corresponds to a certain response. If so, these concepts are dependent on the existence of the response associated with the response-disposition. The disposition must have been manifested at some time or other. An example of such a concept could be the concept of nausea being dependent on the mental response of nausea. But what kind of dependence do we have here? Is personal experience of

nausea essential to possessing a concept of it? Hardly; someone who is lucky enough never to have felt nauseated can still know that there is a certain kind of sensation that people have just before throwing up and to which they refer as *nausea*. While those who have never felt nauseated have an incomplete *conception* of nausea, they can still possess a *concept* of it. Those who *have* felt nauseated could then be the experts defining the concept and the others form their incomplete conceptions on the basis of that. Arguably, the concept would not exist if it were not for those who have felt nauseated having that response. Those who have never felt nauseated might not possess the concept of nausea if *someone* had not had the response and reported it.

The above seems similar to Frank Jackson's famous example of Mary who has never seen anything colored, having spent her life secluded in a black-and-white environment (Jackson 1982). Even though Mary studies the world and visual experiences of it intensely in a scientific manner, there is still something that she is missing, says Jackson. Although the argument Jackson develops, the so-called *Knowledge Argument*, is not exactly about response-dependence, the idea is similar to a certain extent. Certain conceptions rely on certain experiences such that without these relevant experiences, something is lost.

While the above account of how response-dispositional concepts are to be possessed sounds reasonably plausible, there are other equally plausible accounts of the same, such as this (and this account may be even closer to Jackson's account of Mary): Even though anyone can possess *some* concept of nausea, there might be another concept of nausea that can only be possessed by those who have experienced it: a concept more closely associated with what it is like to be in that state. As a result, there may be two

different concepts of the disposition to produce nausea: one for those who have experienced the response and another for those who must rely on their testimony. Both concepts are response-dispositional as they are concepts of a disposition to produce a mental response in suitable subjects under suitable conditions. And while not everyone has experienced the appropriate mental response, those who have not rely on the testimony of those who have and thus their concept is indirectly dependent on the existence of the response.

In both of the above versions, the concept of the disposition has a certain ontological dependence on the occurrence of the response. But is it always the case with concepts of dispositions to produce mental responses that they would not exist (i.e. nobody would possess them) if nobody had ever had such a response? I think not; at least it seems by no means necessary. We could have a concept of, say, a disposition to produce an after-death experience which we imagine to be an essentially mental response. For obvious reasons, neither I nor anyone I know has had an after-death experience. Furthermore, as far as I know, no appropriately reliable testimony of after-death experience has ever been made available. The concept admittedly does not involve a vivid notion of what an after-death experience would be like, but it is still a concept of a disposition to produce a mental response in suitable subjects under suitable conditions. Other similar examples are the concepts of being bewitched and of reaching nirvana. From this I must conclude that a response-dispositional concept in Johnston's sense is not a concept that relies on the *existence* or *occurrence* of a certain response. It merely consists in this: I cannot possess a concept of a disposition to produce an after-death experience without also possessing a concept of an after-death experience (the response) itself.

The dependence involved may become clearer when Philip Pettit's (1991) account is considered.<sup>21</sup> Pettit characterizes response-dependence in terms of what he calls response-privileging concepts. He uses the concept of redness as an example of such a concept:

It is a priori knowable that if something is red then it will look red in normal circumstances to normal observers, so ignorance is ruled out in that situation. And it is a priori knowable that if something looks red in normal circumstances to normal observers then it is red, so error is equally ruled out in that situation (p. 597).

Here, the "looking red"-response is privileged in the sense that it is guaranteed to be involved in the concept. A concept that is not that of looking red in the appropriate circumstances must be a concept of something other than redness. The concept of redness is dependent on the response we have when things look red. While Pettit's account of response-dependence differs from Johnston's, this dependence ought to hold for Johnston's response-dispositional concepts as well. According to Pettit, response-dispositional concepts must be response-privileging even though a concept can be response-privileging without being response-dispositional.

Contrary to those already mentioned, some accounts of response-dependence emphasize response-dependence as applied to properties and not concepts. One such account is endorsed by Ralph Wedgwood:

...a response-dependence account is an *ontological* or *metaphysical* account, of what it is for things to be F. It is stated entirely at the level of reference, not at the level of sense. It is not a semantical account, of the meaning of the term 'F'; nor is it an epistemological or psychological account, of the way in which we think about, or achieve epistemic access to, an object's being F. In that sense, it is not an account of the concept F—at least not if the concept is the meaning of the term

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<sup>21</sup> Other writings by Pettit on the subject of response-dependence include Pettit 1993 and Pettit 1998.



'F', or a way of thinking about the property of being F (Wedgwood 1998, pp. 35-36).

Wedgwood is basing his account of response-dependence on the intuition that some properties are less objective than others. The account of response-dependence is intended to throw light on that intuition and the definition is this: "A property counts as response-dependent if, and only if, it is part of what it is for something to have the property that it stands in a certain relation to a certain mental response to that property" (p. 36).

The intuition with which Wedgwood is dealing is more or less the same as the one driving my search for an objective/subjective property distinction, and I agree with Wedgwood that a response-dependence account of concepts does not cover that intuition adequately. In the next section, I will discuss in more detail why Wedgwood—and I—think response-dependence accounts of concepts are insufficient for this purpose.

### **3.3. Concepts or Properties?**

As I explained in the last section, response-dependence accounts can have either concepts or properties as their focus. We can call those which focus on concepts *semantic accounts* and those which are directed at properties *ontological accounts*.

For my purposes, a semantic account of response-dependence is insufficient. An account of a concept is not an account of a property and it is a property account that I want. The account I seek of subjective properties must distinguish them from objective properties on an ontological level. If response-

dependence is to be of any use for that, it must be so on the level of properties. In other words, do response-dependent concepts represent properties that are subjective in the sense that matters? If so, a semantic account could still be useful by providing me with the directions to the properties for which I am looking.

Johnston's response-dependent concepts are concepts of a certain kind of dispositions. While, as I have pointed out, a concept of a disposition to produce a response must rely on a concept of the response, there is not an analogous reliance of the disposition itself on the response itself. An object can have the property without the response occurring, that is, it can have a disposition to produce a response without that disposition's ever being manifested. Just as the fragility of an object is not dependent on the actual breaking of the object, its disposition to produce a feeling of pleasure under certain conditions is independent of whether those conditions ever occur and thus the feeling of pleasure is produced. To put it simply: claiming that all dispositions were ontologically dependent on their manifestations would be absurd.

If we turn to Pettit's response-privileging concepts we see that Pettit himself emphasizes that they do not have to represent properties that are subjective. He claims that response-dependence can be consistent with objectivism, which he describes in this way: "The objects posited exist and have their character fixed independently of the dispositions of participants in the discourse to assert and believe things about them" (Pettit 1991, p. 590). When a concept is response-privileging it means that a response had by a suitable subject under the specified conditions is guaranteed to be appropriate. By definition, the subject's response is a correct representation.

However, that does not entail that the subject's response is what makes it so that the object in question has the property in question.

A response-dependence account providing the metaphysical distinction I am seeking must be an account of properties. It is possible that the subjective properties for which I am looking happen to be exactly those represented by response-dependent concepts, but I doubt we have a particular reason to think that is the case. At any rate, if response-dependent concepts really are the key to subjective properties, some explaining of why it is so is necessary. An account that is of concepts only is insufficient; the account must involve a description of the properties themselves.

Since I am looking for an ontological difference between something we can call subjective and objective properties, according to which subjective properties are dependent on something mental, it should go without saying that an account of properties ontologically dependent on mental responses would be what I need. Properties that are, ontologically speaking, response-dependent could be the subjective properties I want, and properties that are not response-dependent in this sense would then be the objective ones. This account must explain in what this dependence consists and what kinds of properties have this dependence. The subjective property I want is a property that an object has in virtue of a mental response of a subject. If it were not for the response, the object would not have the property. The objective property I want is a property that a thing has regardless of such a mental response. Hence, a truly response-dependent property—a property dependent for its instantiation on a mental response—must be subjective. But is this what accounts of so-called response-dependent properties are really about?

The criteria I have been outlining for truly response-dependent properties find some resonance in Wedgwood's account. According to Wedgwood, an account of a response-dependent property is a constitutive account: "I propose that a property is response-dependent just in case any adequate constitutive account of what it is for something to have the property must mention some type of mental response to that property" (Wedgwood 1998, p. 41). A constitutive account, he says, is an account that answers the question of why an object has the property in question, of what constitutes the object's having the property, in what it consists, what makes it the case that it has the property or in virtue of what it is true that it does. This sounds promising. If a mental response is a part of what makes it so that a property is instantiated, the property is mind-dependent in the appropriate sense. But how can this account be stated more specifically?

As Wedgwood points out, it is not very clear what it means for something to constitute the having of a property and thus it requires further clarification what this kind of account involves. While he claims that a constitutive account can be stated as a necessary, universally quantified biconditional, he makes it clear that not all such biconditionals qualify. The biconditional must involve the *essence* of the property. Wedgwood goes on to give an account of essence, according to which a statement of essence is a "real definition" of something or a "basic necessary principle" determining its extension. His description of property essence is as follows:

...if we are concerned, not with an individual, but with a property or relation, then the basic necessary principle about the property or relation will concern what it is for a sequence of objects to exemplify this property or relation: it will be the principle that determines which sequences of objects (if any), in any possible world, are instances of that property or relation (p. 48).

Wedgwood's clarified definition of a response-dependent property follows: "A property is response-dependent just in case it is an essential part of something's being an instance of the property that it stands in some relation to some sort of mental response to that property" (p. 50). This looks like something that might work. But what is it that makes it so that constitutive accounts of some properties, but not of others, must mention a mental response? Let us consider an account that might help.

### **3.4. Rigidity**

The ongoing search is one for the right kind of response-dependence; the kind that gives us the proper relation to a mental response. One hopeful candidate is so-called non-rigidity. It has been suggested that rigid or rigidified response-dependent accounts are accounts of objective properties (Pettit 1991, Vallentyne 1996, Railton 1998). Peter Vallentyne (Vallentyne 1996), for one, defends the view that while non-rigid accounts of response-dependence have ontological significance, rigid accounts have only semantic significance and hence do not make the properties in question subjective:

...response-dependent accounts that rigidly fix (in a way that I shall make precise) the relevant responsive dispositions and conditions are, I shall argue, ontologically, simply a form of objectivism (p. 102).

In order to evaluate this, we must of course make clear what rigid and non-rigid accounts of response-dependence are. First, let us take a look at Vallentyne's way of making that distinction:

A rigid response-dependent account of wrongness, recall, is one for which there is a fixed (non-variable) set of responsive dispositions and conditions (including the laws and regularities governing those responsive dispositions) that is the basis for evaluating the wrongness of *all* actions. Historically, the most well-known sort of rigid account is the *ideal observer theory*. According to (a simple form of) this account, to say that an action is wrong is to say that it would be disapproved of when considered under specified ideal conditions by specified ideal (e.g., fully rational and perfectly benevolent) beings. Such an account is rigid, because neither the relevant conditions nor the relevant responsive dispositions vary with the action being assessed (p. 105).

On a non-rigid account, on the other hand, the responsive dispositions and conditions are not fixed:

A well known sort of *non-rigid* account is one for which the wrongness of an action is determined by how the members of the *agent's* society would at the time and in the world of the *action* respond to it. Given that the specified responsive dispositions typically vary, at least somewhat, by society, time, and world, wrongness on this account genuinely tracks responsive dispositions. The dispositions vary, and wrongness varies along with them (p. 104).

What Vallentyne seems to be saying is that on a rigid account of  $p$ , what determines its instantiation is fixed to the actual world whereas on a non-rigid account, the conditions for the instantiation of  $p$  are relative to each world. If the account of  $p$  is rigid, two intrinsically identical objects, one in world  $W_1$  and the other in world  $W_2$ , will either both have  $p$  or neither of them will have it, depending on responses to such objects in the actual world. If the account of  $p$  is non-rigid, one of the objects could have  $p$  in  $W_1$  and not in  $W_2$ , depending on responses to such objects in those worlds. The distinction Vallentyne has given seems to be one between world-relative and non-relative properties. There certainly seem to be reasons to consider such a distinction a plausible candidate for a distinction between subjective and objective properties. For instance, many disputes about the objectivity of color have rested on the issue

of whether two intrinsically identical objects would have the same color in different possible worlds. The color objectivists will claim that they would while the subjectivists will claim that deny it. But what does rigidity have to do with it?

Vallentyne seems to think of his distinction between rigid and non-rigid response-dependent accounts as similar to Saul Kripke's account of rigid designation (Kripke 1980). For instance, Vallentyne considers the Kripkean notion of 'water' as  $H_2O$  analogous to a rigid response-dependent account (Vallentyne 1996, p. 107). According to Kripke, a term is a rigid designator if it refers to the same individual in all possible worlds. A name is a rigid designator while a description such as "the president of the US" is not. Accounts of response-dependent properties are, however, not accounts of singular terms. Is it possible to give the same kind of account for ontological entities such as properties as for singular terms?

If the distinction is intended to be perfectly analogous with Kripke's, then first of all it must be about property terms rather than the properties themselves. It must be so that a property term is rigid if it refers to the same property in all possible worlds, and non-rigid if it refers to different properties in different possible worlds.<sup>22</sup> It is somewhat unclear what this means unless we have an account of sameness for properties. When is a property the same property in  $W_1$  and  $W_2$  and what makes two properties different properties?

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<sup>22</sup> This definition is similar to the one described by López de Sa (2001) as a straightforward characterization of rigidity for predicates. Different attempts have been made to define rigidity and non-rigidity for predicates or property terms, such as defining rigid property terms as those referring to essential properties (Marti 2004). That definition, however, is obviously not one helpful for distinguishing between subjective and objective properties and will not be discussed further here.

However, let us leave that issue aside and assume that a distinction between rigid and non-rigid property terms can be made this way.

Now we have a distinction between two different kinds of property terms. It is by no means clear that it entails a distinction between two kinds of properties. Can it be said that a property is subjective if and only if it is represented by a non-rigid term and objective if and only if it is represented by a rigid term? For that to be the case, there must be a one-one correspondence between property terms and properties. Each property can only be represented by one term and each term can only refer to one property. But the whole idea behind non-rigid property terms was that such terms referred to different properties in different possible worlds.

Let us take a closer look at this: An account of subjective and objective properties derived from a distinction between rigid and non-rigid response-dependent property terms must look something like this: A property is subjective if and only if it is represented by a non-rigid response-dependent property term. A property is objective if it is represented by a rigid property term.

What properties could be examples reflecting this distinction? Finding an example of an objective property is easy enough. Presumably, the term *squareness* refers to the same property in all possible worlds, namely the property of squareness. And taking squareness to be an objective property does not seem far-fetched. But what would be a good example of the other kind of property; a property represented by a response-dependent property term that refers to different properties in different possible worlds?

A property frequently considered subjective is funniness. Is funniness represented by a property term referring to different properties in different possible worlds? I take it that it is best represented by the term *funniness*. But



what does it mean for that term to refer to different properties in different worlds? It can hardly mean that it only refers to the property funniness in some worlds and to, say, grotesqueness in some other worlds and to reasonableness in yet other worlds. The idea must be that in some possible worlds, things with green spots are funny, in other worlds square things are funny and in yet other worlds, clumsy people tripping on banana peels are funny. So in  $W_1$ , *funniness* refers to the property of having green spots, in  $W_2$ , *funniness* refers to the property of squareness, and in  $W_3$ , *funniness* refers to the property (or property conjunction) of being human and tripping on banana peel. This either implies that there is no such property as funniness (only the term *funniness* exists but not the associated property) or that the property funniness is identical with various other properties in a world-relative manner. In  $W_1$ , the property of funniness is the property of green-spottedness, etc. This seems strange.

Another problem with the account is reflected in this example: In  $W_2$ , the term *funniness* (allegedly) refers to squareness. That means that squareness is a property that (in some worlds) is represented by a non-rigid response-dependent property term. But that can hardly make squareness a subjective property—a result inconsistent with the previous claim that squareness is an objective property.

The upshot is that for an account of subjective *properties*, we cannot use an account that makes the subjective properties disappear. If funniness is going to be a subjective property, we must be able to assume that there is such a property and not that there is only the corresponding property term referring to some other properties. Furthermore, it simply sounds implausible to say that a term such as *funniness* refers to different properties in different

possible worlds. It seems to me that *funniness* refers to the property of funniness in all possible worlds (in which funniness is instantiated). Whatever it is that distinguishes funniness from squareness cannot be explained by the rigidity or non-rigidity of the terms *funniness* and *squareness* as both seem equally rigid given an account analogous to Kripke's.<sup>23</sup>

As I mentioned above, Vallentyne thinks of his distinction between rigid and non-rigid accounts of response-dependence as consistent with Kripke's account. He uses "water=H<sub>2</sub>O" as an analogy to explain his account of rigid response-dependent accounts. Furthermore, Vallentyne's explanations of the difference between rigid and non-rigid accounts certainly involve the assumption that the distinction has to do with the identity of properties in a Kripkean spirit. For instance, he says that on a non-rigid account, wrongness varies along with the varying dispositions in different societies (1996, p. 104), and about rigid accounts he has this to say:

...wrongness, so understood, just is whatever it evokes, under the rigidly specified conditions, the specified response from the rigidly fixed responsive dispositions of the beings at the rigidly specified conditions, the specified response from the rigidly fixed responsive dispositions of the beings at the rigidly specified time and world. Consequently, wrongness is identical with the evoking attributes (p. 106).

If Vallentyne's account really is an account of term reference, as Kripke's, he is wrong about its ontological repercussions. Kripke's account is semantical and one of the points he makes is that the same object can be represented by both rigid and non-rigid designators. There is no reason to think that an

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<sup>23</sup> It has been suggested by López de Sa (2001) that the predicates that count as non-rigid are predicates such as *being the color of ripe tomatoes* (as it refers to redness in some possible worlds but other colors in other possible worlds). Schnieder (2005) rejects that and claims that non-rigid predicates are even more difficult to find.

analogous account of the reference of property terms should be more likely to reflect an ontological distinction.

As I have shown, a distinction between subjective and objective properties based on an account of the reference of rigid and non-rigid property terms does not work. However, if we ignore what appears to be Vallentyne's commitment to Kripkean rigidity, and interpret his account as one of the conditions determining the instantiation of a property, we may end up with a distinction between subjective and objective properties based on world-relativity. What remains unclear, then, is where rigidity comes into play. I will take a closer look at relativity in the next section.

Another account of rigid and non-rigid response-dependence is Nick Zangwill's (2000). Zangwill claims that rigid response-dependence has to do with intrinsic dispositions while non-rigid response-dependence has to do with extrinsic dispositions:

For a rigid response-dependence theorist, the disposition to provoke responses is an intrinsic disposition whereas for a non-rigid theorist, it is an extrinsic disposition. Rigid response-dependence theories allow that the disposition is determined by the intrinsic properties of the thing in question plus the laws, and it does not vary with varying responses. Non-rigid response-dependent theories, by contrast, deny that the disposition is determined solely by the intrinsic properties of a thing plus the laws, and they allow that if our responses were to vary then the colors or sounds would vary (p. 607).

Zangwill seems to be saying that according to a rigid account, the disposition has the same cause or categorical base in all possible worlds. In the non-rigid case, the disposition's cause varies. Our subjective responses (or those of some other subjects) then play a crucial role in determining the disposition and it seems more than reasonable to think of such properties as subjective. It makes perfect sense to think of an extrinsic disposition that has

to be partly determined by a subject's response as subjective. The problem, however, is that it is by no means clear what this has to do with Kripkean rigidity.

The accounts offered by Vallentyne and Zangwill of rigid and non-rigid response-dependence share a flaw: Where is the rigidity? It seems to me that things would be much clearer if Vallentyne simply spoke of relative and non-relative response-dependence and Zangwill stuck to speaking of internal and external dispositions. Calling the accounts rigid and non-rigid does not seem to help.

Pettit's (1991) and Railton's (1998) applications of rigidity or rigidification are more enlightening. Their accounts of rigid/rigidified definitions of response-dependent properties are basically the same. Here is Railton's example of a rigidified definition: "x is red = x is such as to elicit in normal humans as they *actually* are (and in *actually* normal circumstances) the visual impression of redness" (Railton 1998, p. 69). The definition is rigidified because it is tied to the responses as they actually are in the actual world. Hence, the instantiation of redness (according to this definition), is determined in the same way in all possible worlds. This can be a helpful way of explaining why a property is not world-relative. But here *rigidity* does not share much with Kripke's semantic rigidity, despite sharing the element of a tie to the actual world having a certain importance.

Indeed, there is no reason to suspect Railton of confusing his account with Kripke's account of rigidity. The term he uses is 'rigidification' and he speaks of rigidified definitions. Rigidification is not to be understood as semantic rigidity. It consists in the definition of the property being "attached" so to speak to the associated response in the actual world.

### 3.5. On Relativity, Biconditionals, and More

It still remains to be clarified what exactly it is that makes a property truly response-dependent in the sense that its instantiation is dependent on the occurrence of a subjective response. While sorting response-dependent terms into rigid and non-rigid does not seem to help, distinguishing rigidified from non-rigidified definitions of response-dependent properties is more promising.

I believe that Wedgwood is on the right track. It sounds very plausible that the true response-dependence of a property would have something to do with whether its instantiation consists in the response. To refresh our memories, Wedgwood's definition is this: "A property is response-dependent just in case it is an essential part of something's being an instance of the property that it stands in some relation to some sort of mental response to that property" (1998, p. 50). Adding a description of what kind of relation is involved will make things clearer:

I propose that the relation that counts is one of ontological dependence. In fact, given Wedgwood's general discussion, it seems likely that he would agree. The difficult part is to specify the relevant kind of ontological dependence. It can hardly be causal dependence. As an example of causal dependence we can take the property of being a coin. For an object to have that property, a group of subjects must have attributed "coinness" to it. However, it seems to be the case that a coin could still be a coin even if no subjects were around anymore or if coins were not in use anymore (perhaps not such a distant possibility) and people were to forget everything about coins.

The dependence I am seeking must be different from this. It is the kind of dependence that is such that if the relevant group of subjects were

permanently to give up any attributions of the property, an object could not have this property any longer.

I said earlier that there was no reason to think of a disposition as dependent on its manifestation. A disposition can be instantiated even though the response it would produce given the appropriate conditions is never manifested (because the right conditions never come up). However, if a response-dependent property is a disposition, or thought of as a disposition, it is a disposition that in fact is dependent on its manifestation. In such a case, object *O* has property *P* precisely because of response *R* by subject *S*. If *p* is a disposition to produce *R*, it means that *O* would not have the disposition if it were not for *R*. However, whether or not the property is a disposition is irrelevant. Think of this example: Let us suppose that funniness is response-dependent in the relevant sense. Something is funny because subjects of type *S* think/believe/decide it is funny, or would find it funny if they were to encounter it. It so happens that something that is funny is disposed to produce amusement in *S*, but that is not what makes funniness response-dependent. What makes it response-dependent is that *O* is funny *because* *S* would judge it to be funny if *S* were in a position to do so (that is, if *S* were to encounter *O*).

A biconditional of the form frequently used to describe dispositions is not sufficient to account for a truly response-dependent property even though it may be true of it. What is needed for the response-dependence is what can be called the “because-I-say-so” factor. If *P* is truly response-dependent, the reason why *O* has *P* is that *S* (or subjects of type *S*) says so, because they have response *R*. If a property is response-*independent*, on the other hand, it is entirely possible that a biconditional involving a disposition holds, yet the “because-I-say-so”-factor is missing. For response-independent property *P*, a

biconditional of the form “ $O$  has  $P$  if and only if  $O$  is disposed to produce  $R$  in  $S$  in  $C$ ” holds, but the production of  $R$  is not the reason why  $O$  has  $P$ .

Truly response-dependent properties can also be thought of as subject-relative or world-relative. In a world in which the subjects have response  $R$  to object  $O$ ,  $O$  has  $P$ . In a world in which the subjects do not have response  $R$  to  $O$ ,  $O$  does not have  $P$ . This is consistent with Vallentyne’s account. It is also consistent with how the line has frequently been drawn between subjective and objective properties, such as in the debate about whether colors are subjective or objective. But what makes a property subjective, or mind-dependent, is not its being relative to *something*. It is its dependence on an actual mental response that does. So perhaps we can say that its being relative to a mental response makes it mind-dependent.

While it is true of a mind-dependent property that its instantiation is relative to worlds and/or subjects, that is a product of its dependence on a mental response. If the instantiation of a property is dependent on a specific type of mental response, then it is inevitably going to be relative to the occurrence of the response. If subjects in  $W1$  are amused by green-spotted things and subjects in  $W2$  are not but instead amused by square things, and funniness is a property dependent on the mental response of being amused, then it is true that green-spotted things are funny in  $W1$  but not in  $W2$ . So it will be true that the instantiation of funniness is world-relative. What makes it so is its dependence on a mental response. Hence, *response-dependence* is a more accurate description of what makes the property subjective than *relativity* or *world-relativity*.

### 3.6. The Distinction

I will now summarize what I consider the fundamentals of a distinction between subjective and objective properties, based on my discussion above in this chapter as well as the one preceding it.

*Response-dependence:*

Subjective properties are properties whose instantiation depends on a subject's corresponding mental response. This response often involves or is accompanied by a judgment to the effect that the object in question has the property. However, such a judgment does not seem necessary. For instance, suppose that the property of being aggravating is instantiated if and only if a subject (or a group of subjects) is aggravated by the object. It is possible that the subject is not aware of her being aggravated; she may not outright judge the aggravating object as such. She may even be in denial about her aggravation. So if we want to insist that a judgment must be involved, at least we must make do with a very loose sense of 'judgment'. What matters is that the subject has the mental response of aggravation. This is what makes it so that the property is instantiated.

Objective properties are those that are, or can be, instantiated independently of subjects' mental responses. Given the assumption that shapes are objective, an object's being spherical is independent of what shape subjects believe it has. Of course it can be dependent on subjects' thoughts in other ways. For example, the reason why a ball is sphereshaped is that those who manufactured it designed it and made it to be of that shape. But that is not the relevant kind of dependence. The ball manufacturers may, after getting hit on the head, suddenly forget all about their previous thoughts about the ball and from then on consider it cube-shaped. The ball would still be spherical.



What I just said about dependence on mental responses indicates that subjective properties are *truly* response-dependent in my sense of that term.

*Rigidification:*

Objective properties are those whose definition is rigidified. That is, even though the definition involves a response, it does not make a *truly* response-dependent property if it is rigidified. The instantiation of the property is not actually dependent on the occurrence of the response. Suppose that we define redness as whatever property that causes a sensation of red in humans, as they actually are, today. This property can be instantiated in another possible world in which humans have a different visual system. It can also be instantiated in this world tomorrow, even if there are no humans around because of some major overnight disaster (or rapture?). And if it is, it means that redness is also instantiated, because redness *is* that property. Then the instantiation of redness is not really dependent on the sensation of redness.

Subjective properties, then, are response-dependent properties whose definition is not rigidified to actual human responses as they are now or anything of the kind. If we defined redness as whatever property that causes a sensation of red in any subject, anytime, anywhere, we would get a subjectively instantiated property.

*Appearance/reality:*

An objective property is such that it can appear without being real. That is, it can appear to me that property *p* is instantiated even though it is not. This follows from the property's instantiation being independent from what I think about it.

*Relativity:*

A subjective property can be considered world-relative or subject-relative. The world-relativity is another way of describing non-rigidification. If property  $p$  is subjective, then in another possible world in which humans (or the relevant subjects—they may not have to be human) have a different perceptual or evaluatory system, property  $p$  picks out different features of objects than it does in this world. A subjective property can also be subject-relative: Suppose Jack finds chocolate delicious and Jill finds it far from delicious. Assuming deliciousness is subjective, we can say that it is instantiated in chocolate relative to Jack but not relative to Jill. What exactly that means will be considered in more depth in the next chapter.

I have now listed the criteria that subjective and objective properties should fulfill on my account. However, several questions remain. Are these criteria consistent? Can there be properties that fulfill them? Is there a clear distinction between those properties? Where do so-called sensory properties fall given such a distinction? These are questions I will address in the remaining chapters.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ON TWO CHALLENGES**

#### **4.1. Why Reject the Distinction?**

As I have mentioned in a previous chapter, the specifics of a proposed distinction between objective and subjective properties can differ widely. However, such accounts all share the basic idea that a subjective property must be mind-dependent in some relevant way in which an objective property is not. Most often, this dependence is understood as strictly ontological and that is the dependence which is relevant here. I established in Chapter 3 that what I would call true response-dependence serves my purpose of making a distinction between subjective and objective properties. Truly response-dependent properties are subjective in the sense that matters, which makes properties whose instantiation is independent of mental responses objective.

In the present chapter I discuss two possible challenges to this distinction between objective and subjective properties, coming from contrasting directions. Each of them implies that there being two kinds of properties, one objective and the other subjective, is impossible. The first challenge makes all properties objective by rejecting the notion of mind-dependent properties. The idea behind it is that facts about a subjectively instantiated property must be somehow subjective or relative. If facts cannot be that way, there are no subjective properties. The second challenge consists in the claim that all properties are subjective, resulting in the futility of a distinction between subjective and objective properties. The kind of subjectivism about properties

that is my main concern is subjectivism about property instantiation. That is, it has to do with the instantiation of a property being contingent in some relevant sense on the responses of subjects: Object *o* possesses property *p* if and only if subjects *s* respond to it in the appropriate manner. But another type of property subjectivism, the view that the existence of properties is subjective, is also possible. Such subjectivism may seem tempting to those who find it plausible that our property concepts are mainly a reflection of our thinking.

Below, I discuss and address both of these challenges. Regarding the first challenge, I argue that while doubts about the notion of subjective or relative facts may be warranted, there are other ways to define subjective properties that reflect how they differ from objective properties. My answer to the second challenge is that the appeals of subjectivism can be saved without giving up the notion of objectively instantiated properties.

## **4.2. No Subjective Properties**

As I mentioned in chapter 1, the intuition seems to be that there can be so-called faultless disagreement about the instantiation of subjective properties<sup>24</sup>. That is, assuming funniness is a subjective property, Emma can say “Grover is funny” and Harriet can say “Grover is not funny” on the same occasion, yet neither of them must be wrong. The intuition about objective properties is different; if Emma says “Grover is 130 cm tall” and Harriet says “Grover is not 130 cm tall” then one of them must be wrong. This is considered

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<sup>24</sup> For a thorough discussion of faultless disagreement, see Kölbel 2004a, MacFarlane 2007, and Wright 2001.

one of the main differences between subjective and objective properties. The idea is that funniness is not a property Grover has inherently, independently of Emma and Harriet's opinions, whereas his exact height is. But how is this possible? Can it really be the case that two people can genuinely disagree about the facts of a subject matter yet both be right about it? That seems to defy the law of non-contradiction.

There is quite a bit at stake here. Let us suppose that the possibility of faultless disagreement about the instantiation of a property is a necessary part of what it is for it to be subjective. If faultless disagreement then turns out to be impossible, there cannot be subjective properties. Therefore, I will first consider the notion of faultless disagreement, and then how important that is for the notion of subjective properties.

#### **4.2.1. Faultless Disagreement**

While an exact definition of disagreement is not to be provided here, a few things can be taken for granted. If Emma and Harriet truly disagree, it is the case that they hold contradictory beliefs. Emma believes  $p$  while Harriet believes  $not-p$ . What exactly that entails may be characterized in different ways, but some might say that it also means that Emma believes that  $a$  is a fact (assuming  $p$  is the proposition “ $a$  obtains” or “It is the case that  $a$ ”), and Harriet believes that  $a$  is not a fact.

If Emma and Harriet's statements about Grover's funniness or lack thereof are a case of genuine disagreement, the following holds:

**GD:**

1. Emma believes that “The property of funniness is instantiated in Grover” is true.
2. Harriet believes that “The property of funniness is instantiated in Grover” is false.

If Emma and Harriet’s disagreement is faultless, we also get:

**FL:**

3. Neither Emma nor Harriet is wrong.

**GD** and **FL** taken together seem to lead to a contradiction: The proposition “The property of funniness is instantiated in Grover” appears to be both true and false. How can this be solved?

One option is to reject **FL**. If we do that, we accept that Emma and Harriet genuinely disagree about Grover’s properties, but deny that both of them are right. This means that one of them must be wrong. Possible ways to reject **FL** include:

**Realism or objectivism about funniness:** Whether Grover is funny or not is not a matter of the judgments of Emma or Harriet but independent of them. We treat funniness the same way as we treat height. Whether Grover is 130 cm tall is not a matter of Emma and Harriet’s judgments; his height has nothing to do with them.

**Monarchy:** Suppose Emma is the queen. We define funniness as a property possessed by whatever thing the queen finds amusing and judges to be funny. Then Grover is funny if and only if Emma judges him to be funny. In this case, whether Grover is funny has everything to do with Emma’s

judgments but nothing with Harriet's. Emma's judgments about funniness are infallible and by definition everyone who disagrees with her about the instantiation of funniness is wrong.

While both realism and monarchy appear to be internally consistent views, the insistence that Harriet must be mistaken about Grover's lack of funniness seems to be a high price to pay. If at all possible, we should try to retain a view consistent with the intuition that neither Emma nor Harriet must be wrong. Rejecting **FL** should be a last resort.

Questioning **GD**, the claim that Emma and Harriet genuinely disagree, seems to be a more fruitful approach. One way to do that is to adopt non-cognitivism about statements assigning properties such as funniness. On that approach, attributions of funniness or lack of funniness do not have truth-value. Hence, Emma and Harriet are not in disagreement about the truth value of anything, or in disagreement about the facts, because their utterances do not involve propositions. Our so-called attributions of subjective properties are not really attributions of anything. And since Emma and Harriet are not really attributing any properties to Grover, they do not really disagree about the truth-value of any proposition. Refuting non-cognitivism is not a task I will take on here. Let it suffice to say that if some kind of non-cognitivism about the properties we might consider subjective is correct, then I am wrong about a great deal of things. I will assume that a statement such as "Grover is funny" really does involve a proposition.

Let me now turn to a view I find more convincing: indexical relativism or indexical contextualism. According to such a view, when Emma says "Grover is funny," she is really saying something about herself and her relation to Grover while Harriet is saying something about Harriet's relation to Grover.

They are not really disagreeing. Emma is saying “Grover has the property of being funny-to-Emma” while Harriet is saying “Grover does not have the property of being-funny-to-Harriet”. Emma is saying that Grover has the property of funniness-to-Emma (and we could even make it time-indexed as well) and Harriet is saying that Grover does not have the property of funniness-to-Harriet. There are no contradictory beliefs involved as there is nothing inconsistent about funny-to-Emma being instantiated in Grover even though funny-to-Harriet is not instantiated.

On this account, there is no such property as funniness *simpliciter*, or at least such a property is never instantiated. Funniness can only be instantiated in the context of a subject. The term ‘funny’ functions as an indexical; just as Emma and Harriet refer to different people when they use the word ‘I’, they refer to different properties when they use the word ‘funny’.

Some philosophers have adopted a view like this about color. Because of variations in color perception, both among humans and between animal species, they claim that shades of color are relative to perceivers and circumstances. One example is Brian McLaughlin’s account:

*Relativized Colours.* Redness for a visual perceiver of type P in circumstances of visual observation C is that property which disposes its bearers to look red to P in C, and which had by everything so disposed (2003, p. 122).

The idea is that there is no such thing as redness; only redness-for-P-in-C. Redness is not one property, but as many properties as there are perceiver/circumstance combinations<sup>25</sup>. Suppose Emma and Harriet are looking at a wall in front of them. Emma says “The wall is red; not orange” and Harriet says “The wall is orange; not red”. On McLaughlin’s account, Emma

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<sup>25</sup> Similar accounts can be found in Spackman 2002 and Cohen 2004; 2006.



and Harriet's statements are not contradictory. Emma's statement really means "The wall is red-for-Emma-at-C1; not orange-for-Emma-at-C1" and Harriet's statement means "The wall is orange-for-Harriet-at-C1; not red-for-Harriet-at-C1".

If an indexical relativist account can be given of any property we might want to consider subjective, we do away with the notion of faultless disagreement. The good thing about that is that then we get rid of the contradiction that GD and FL seem to entail when taken together. GD no longer holds, as Emma thinks that Grover is funny-for-Emma and Harriet thinks Grover is not-funny-for-Harriet. Then we do not have to worry about how faultless disagreement works; even though Emma and Harriet appear to be in disagreement there is no real disagreement.

Some think that the possibility of faultless disagreement about the instantiation of a property is necessary for making it subjective. According to such a view, faultless disagreement is meant to indicate that facts about the instantiation of the properties in question are relative or subjective. And furthermore, a property can only be subjective if the facts about its instantiation are subjective. Hence, if funniness is a subjective property, then Emma and Harriet can both be right when one of them claims that funniness is instantiated in Grover and the other denies it, because facts about the instantiation of funniness are not like facts about Grover's height. If, however, this relativity or subjectivity of facts can be stripped away (through explaining away faultless disagreement), there are no subjective properties.

Although it is not exactly how he presents it, this seems to be what Gideon Rosen has in mind in his paper "Objectivity and Modern Idealism: What is the Question?" (Rosen 1994). His claim is that no properties can be

subjective in the sense he considers relevant for a distinction between realism and idealism. The reason, says Rosen, is that subjective facts are nowhere to be found, and it takes a subjective fact to make a subjective property. Facts about the properties people might think of as subjective are, after all, no different from any other facts; therefore the properties are not subjective in the relevant sense. Given Rosen's premises, he seems to be right. That is, if it is the case both that facts about the instantiation of subjective properties must be subjective, and that the candidates Rosen considers for such properties are the best candidates, he must be right. However, both of these premises can be questioned.

Rosen claims that there is no motivation to be found for realism, or for a conflict between realists (about any given subject matter) and those to whom he refers as modern idealists. He describes the core of the realists' project as a claim to objectivity in the relevant sense:

We can epitomize the realist's basic commitment by saying that for the realist as against his opponents, the target discourse describes a domain of genuine, objective fact. The basic foundational question is then: What is objectivity in the relevant sense, and what are the alternatives? Can we find a definite and debatable thesis upon whose truth the legitimacy of the rhetoric of objectivity depends? (pp. 278-9)

The task of the antirealists or idealists is to reject this sense of objectivity that the realists propose. Rosen claims that the kind of objectivity that must be relevant to the conflict is nowhere to be found. And since we are missing the relevant objectivity, there can be no real dispute between realists and anti-realists. Hence, Rosen proposes a quietism concerning the matter, "a rejection of the question to which 'realism' was supposed to be the answer" (p. 279). It follows that there can be no interesting ontological distinction between

objective and subjective properties as there is only one ontological kind to which properties can belong. The relevant kind of objectivity to which a meaningful sense of subjectivity could be contrasted does not exist.

Even though Rosen is out to show the lack of a relevant kind of objectivity, the focus of his arguments is to show that there is no relevant sense of subjectivity, or mind-dependence, against which objectivity can be contrasted. Objectivity in the relevant sense is a kind of mind-independence, to be contrasted with the relevant sense of mind-dependence. Rosen discusses a few candidates for the position of mind-dependent property and rejects them one by one. His arguments for doing so share the following structure: A candidate for a subjective property is considered. Rosen then shows how facts about the instantiation of this property are no different from other facts, i.e., that there is nothing distinctively subjective about them. Since a property is subjective only if facts about its instantiation are subjective, the property in question is disqualified as a candidate for being a subjective property. Rosen goes through a list of what he considers the most suitable candidates and reaches the conclusion that since there are no subjective facts, there can be no subjective properties. The upshot seems to be that mind-dependent properties are nowhere to be found, which makes any distinction between subjective and objective properties pointless. Therefore, the basis for realism is missing.

I have now outlined Rosen's undermining of a distinction between subjective and objective properties. Next I will turn to a closer inspection of his arguments and what I consider the best response to them.

### 4.2.2. Subjective Facts?

Objectivity in the relevant sense is something Rosen attributes to objects, properties, and facts: “The residual issue concerns not the existence of the objects, properties and facts described by the disputed discourse, but rather what we have called their objectivity” (p. 282). However, in this respect Rosen considers facts prior to objects and properties. In fact, he defines objective properties and objects in terms of objective facts:

From the present perspective, the line between the objective and the rest is a line drawn within the world of facts so conceived. If the world is the totality of facts, then we may distinguish (at least notionally) the objective world — the totality of objective facts — from the world as whole. *P* is an objective property if it is an objective fact whether an object possesses it: and an object *x* is objective if the fact that *x* exists is an objective fact (p. 287).

Rosen’s claim is that if we are to be able to make sense of realism, we must be able to divide facts into objective and non-objective facts. Rosen does not provide us with a definition of objective facts, but his discussion suggests that he has in mind facts that exist independently of us, waiting to be discovered. On the other hand, non-objective or subjective facts would be made up by the subjects. This distinction is, for example, suggested here: “The question about the objectivity of mathematics (which may or may not be the question Kreisel called *the* question) is similarly: Are the mathematical facts – the states of affairs that correlate with the truths of mathematics – entirely independent of our mathematical thinking, or are they rather somehow constructed by it?” (p. 287). Hence, a non-objective fact (or a subjective fact) would be dependent on or constructed by human thought in some important sense in which an objective fact is not.

The term *subjective fact* is not one widely used in the philosophical literature. It has sometimes been used in association with Frank Jackson's knowledge argument, as described by Tim Crane (2003): "The knowledge argument is a sound argument for the conclusion that there are subjective facts: facts about the subjective character of experience" (p. 69). Crane defines a subjective fact focusing on what it takes for someone to come to know it:

A subjective fact, as I defined it above, is a fact the learning of which requires that the learner has a certain kind of experience or occupies a certain position in the world" (Crane 2003, p. 79).

What makes a fact subjective in this sense is its content or what it is about. Physical facts are facts about the physical, objective facts are facts about the objective, and subjective facts are facts about the subjective. This distinction between different kinds of facts is not based on what it is that makes it so that the facts obtain. The facts subjective in this sense are not any different in structure, so to speak, from objective facts. The notion Rosen is assuming is, on the other hand, one according to which the obtaining of a subjective fact is dependent on the mind of the speaker. It is not clear that the facts that are subjective in Crane's sense fulfill that.

The notion of 'subjective fact' found in Iris Einheuser's "Three Forms of Truth-Relativism" (forthcoming) is closer to what Rosen has in mind. On Einheuser's account, subjective facts are determined not only about the way the world is but also by the perspective of a subject (or a similarly minded group of subjects). Hence, they are perceiver-relative or subject-relative and thereby different from objective, absolute facts that are determined solely by the way the world is independently of a subjective perspective. This is similar

to the ontological distinction between different kinds of facts that Rosen considers necessary for a distinction between different kinds of properties.

From the start, Rosen is skeptical of the possibility of a distinction between subjective and objective facts: “So far as I can see, it adds nothing to the claim that a certain state of affairs obtains to say that it obtains objectively” (p. 279). The intuition expressed here is convincing. However, if it is so clear that a subjective/objective distinction cannot apply to facts, then why should we assume that such a distinction for properties would have to be based on it? What Rosen shows is that given his definitions of the properties he describes, there is no faultless disagreement about them. What he infers from that is that there is no room for relative or subjective facts and thus no room for subjective properties.

### **4.2.3. Rosen’s Arguments**

Even though Rosen ultimately rejects the notion of ‘subjective fact’, he seems to have something fairly specific in mind when he rejects it. In order to show that facts about certain properties are not subjective, he must outline the requirements they are failing to fulfill. He measures some candidates for subjective properties against these criteria and finds that none of them are adequate, that is, facts about these candidates seem no different from any other facts. Thus, there are no subjective facts and no subjective properties.

One of the candidates Rosen considers for the relevant kind of subjectivity is Mark Johnston’s notion of response-dependence<sup>26</sup>, already

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Johnston 1993.

discussed in Chapter 3. The candidacy proposal Rosen outlines for response-dependent properties is as follows:

When the central concepts of a discourse are response-dependent, the true sentences within the discourse represent a range of subjective or mind-dependent facts. A fact is genuinely objective, then, when it is represented in a discourse whose central concepts are response-independent (Rosen 1994, p. 292).

According to this proposal, if a property is represented by response-dependent concepts, then facts about it are presented as subjective. Rosen then argues that the facts in question are not subjective; therefore the properties cannot be either. This is Rosen's argument:

The concept of being annoying to fox terriers is a response-dependent concept, as it involves the mental state of annoyance. However, we can make a list of the things that qualify as annoying to fox terriers (pullings of tails, pokings of eyes, etc.) and speak of the list as we speak of any other fact. We can speak of how tail pulling is disposed to produce annoyance in a fox terrier just like we speak of any other disposition:

The point is the obvious one: dispositions to bring about mental responses would seem to be on a par, metaphysically speaking, with dispositions to produce merely physical responses in inanimate things: the qualities Locke calls mere 'active Powers'. Absent a reason to construe mentality itself as less than fully real, the facts about the annoying, the embarrassing and the rest are no different from facts about the poisonous or the corrosive (p. 293).

The conclusion is that we have no reason to think of the facts in question as any less objective than any other facts. There is nothing more subjective about the fact that eye-poking is annoying to fox terriers than there is about the fact that arsenic is poisonous.

Rosen next considers whether different rules may apply when it comes to concepts involving our own mental responses. He argues that if this simply means that the concept in question is one of a disposition to produce mental responses in a group to which we happen to belong, there is no reason to think of the facts as failing to be objective: “The facts about which things annoy *human beings* or *late twentieth-century bourgeois intellectuals* are not materially different from the corresponding facts about fox terriers” (p. 294). As a result, Rosen considers the proposal to have failed.

I think Johnston’s definition of response-dependence is a bad choice for Rosen’s purpose. Johnston himself proposes a “qualified” realism about properties of which we have response-dependent (or response-dispositional) concepts. His definition is one of *concepts* of properties and not of the *properties* themselves. As I argue in detail in Chapter 3, a response-dependent concept is by no means the same thing as a response-dependent property. It is not the same thing for a concept to be somehow dependent on a mental response as it is for a property represented by the concept to be dependent for its instantiation upon the response. Properties represented by response-dependent concepts are not the most suitable candidates for subjective properties.

However, I think we can disregard the concept/property issue here and keep the focus on the underlying properties. What about properties such as being annoying to fox terriers, being annoying to humans or being annoying to late twentieth-century bourgeois intellectuals? What seems to be the issue here is the underlying assumption that these properties are index-relative or what might be called rigidly response-dependent. Rosen is not considering a property such as being annoying *simpliciter*, only what is annoying to a certain



subject or group of subjects. In other words, the definition of annoying to fox terriers is rigidified to fox terriers as they actually are. Rosen does not address the possibility of disagreement among humans (or among fox terriers), for instance, about what is annoying. Defenders of the notion of subjective fact would be happy to concede that a statement such as “Boy-band music is annoying to 57% of humans” refers to an objective fact. Their point would be that this was not a statement about whether boy-band music is annoying, period. While facts about what is annoying to a particular subject or a unanimous group of subjects may be a pure matter of observation, facts about what is *annoying* are different. Rosen does nothing to address that difference.

Another candidate for the relevant kind of subjectivity discussed by Rosen is based on Crispin Wright’s notion of judgment dependence (Wright 1992):

Let us say that a concept *F* is *judgment-dependent* if and only if

[...] It is a priori that : *x* is *F* iff certain subjects *S* would judge that *x* is *F* under conditions *C* (Rosen 1994, p. 297).

Rosen considers (and ultimately rejects) the following proposal:

When the central predicates of a discourse are judgment-dependent, the facts that discourse describes are less-than-fully objective (p. 298).

Rosen claims that we have no reason to think of the facts in this case as anything short of fully objective. An example that shows that is the case of constitutionality, as judgment-dependent as anything gets:

It is a priori that: A U.S. law is constitutional (at *t*) iff the majority of the US supreme court, after informed and unbiased deliberation, would judge it constitutional (at *t*) (p. 300).

Facts about how the majority of supreme court judges would vote after informed and unbiased deliberation seem no different from any other facts about how some certain subset of humans would behave under particular circumstances. And here we do not seem to have an index-relative property; there is no issue of constitutional-to-Jack vs. constitutional-to-Jill as constitutionality is by this definition tied to the majority vote of a pre-defined group. But let us revisit the discussion above of faultless disagreement and consider how constitutionality fares: If Jack and Jill disagree about whether a particular law is constitutional, the matter can be settled: Let the supreme court rule on it after informed and unbiased deliberation. The disagreement is not faultless; either Jack or Jill must be wrong. This definition of constitutionality would fall under what I call monarchy above. There is a specific group of subjects that gets to judge what is constitutional. Those who are wrong about how the supreme court would rule are wrong about what is constitutional; it is as simple as that.

Rosen considers another case of judgment dependence, somewhat different from constitutionality:

Suppose that

It is a priori that:  $x$  is funny iff we would judge  $x$  funny under conditions of full information about  $x$ 's relevant extra-comedic features (p. 301).

The main difference between this example and the one of constitutionality is that here it is we who get to do the judging rather than a small group of supreme court judges. Who, exactly, the relevant "we" are is not specified. It can be the members of some subcultural group, the members

of a nation, the human race, etc. The important part is that we think of ourselves as insiders of the group.

Rosen argues that an anthropologist who does not share the group's sense of humor should be able to predict fairly reliably how our judgments of funniness will turn out, and thus which things have the property of being funny. The anthropologist has studied our behavior meticulously for an extended period of time and has accumulated reliable knowledge about how we behave and react in a great range of circumstances. From the outsider's point of view, facts about which things have the property of funniness are just as objective as any other facts; they are simply facts about how we would behave under certain conditions. Facts about a judgment-dependent property boil down to being facts about our practices—facts about what kinds of judgments we make or would make given certain conditions—and it should not matter whether the point of view is the outsider's or ours. As Rosen puts it: "From a metaphysical point of view, biography and autobiography are on a par" (p. 302).

What is missing here is, as in the response-dependent case, the consideration of possible disagreement. What happens if "we" do not agree about what is funny? If funniness is determined by majority rule, it becomes a case of monarchy, just like constitutionality. The same holds if "we" are such a like-minded group that we always agree about what is funny (given the specified conditions). And while a monarchy definition may work for constitutionality, I doubt that such a definition is in order for funniness. Are we really willing to hand all ultimate decisions about what is funny to some unanimous group of comedic experts, even though "we" get to be members of that group?

Rosen's examples and arguments show that there are ways to describe or define properties frequently thought of as subjective that do not make facts about their instantiation subjective. But they do not show that there are no properties about which there could be subjective facts. If we are to consider the strongest possible candidates for properties about which there are subjective facts, we must look at properties such as funniness *simpliciter* or beauty *simpliciter*. A very important aspect of funniness and beauty is that there is not universal agreement among us (whoever "we" are) about when and where they are instantiated. If we generally did agree about their instantiation, we would be less inclined to think of them as subjective.

#### **4.2.4. So, What About Subjective Properties?**

According to those who endorse relativism about facts or truth, it is precisely facts about the instantiation of properties such as funniness or beauty *simpliciter* (or propositions about such instantiation, depending on the version of relativism) that are relative. Such a view is, for example, held by Iris Einheuser (forthcoming) and John MacFarlane<sup>27</sup>. On Einheuser's view, certain facts, or facts about certain kinds of things, are relative to a perspective. MacFarlane's version is slightly different: propositions about certain kinds of things have relative truth-values. What these views share is that they save faultless disagreement about the things in question. When Emma says "Grover is funny" and Harriet says "Grover is not funny", they are genuinely

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<sup>27</sup> For more on relativism, see López de Sa (forthcoming), Kölbel (2004b), and Zimmerman (2007).

disagreeing yet both right because it is relative whether Grover has the property of funniness; he both has it and does not have it.

If someone is to argue against the possibility of subjective properties on the basis of the assumption that they must rest on subjective facts, these are the kinds of accounts at which the argument should be directed. If we want to avoid the notions of relative truth and subjective/relative facts, we may infer that there are no such properties as funniness *simpliciter*. That is, it may be a good reason to adopt some version of indexical relativism about properties such as funniness. If, on the other hand, we are willing to accept that truth and/or facts can be relative, we can say that a property is subjective if propositions about its instantiation are relatively true or if facts about its instantiation are relative.

What I am claiming is that we have two alternatives for providing an account of subjective properties. One involves adopting relativism of the kind endorsed by Einheuser and MacFarlane. On such an account, a property is subjective if facts about its instantiation are subjective or relative. Funniness is subjective if it can be a fact that Grover is funny and at the same time a fact that Grover is not funny.

If the notion of subjective or relative facts turns out to be too hard to stomach, there is another way to account for subjective properties. This is the second alternative. Reliance on subjective or relative facts is not necessary for distinguishing between properties that are subjectively instantiated and properties that are objectively instantiated. We can say that subjective properties are those that can only be instantiated relative to a subject. If so, then there is no fact about whether Grover is or is not funny *simpliciter*; there is only the fact that Grover is funny-to-Emma and the fact that he is not funny-

to-Harriet. This subject-relative instantiation is what makes the property mind-dependent. For each instance of the property, a subject's attribution of it plays a crucial role in its instantiation. Contrast this with Grover's height; whether Grover is 130 cm tall has nothing to do with how tall Emma, Harriet or anyone else thinks he is.

Let us now go briefly over the available options in the case when Emma and Harriet seem to disagree about whether Grover is funny:

**1. The disagreement is genuine and it is faultless.** If this is possible, there must be a way in which facts can be relative or truth can be relative. And in that case, facts/truth about subjective properties are/is relative and that is why they are subjective. On the other hand, facts/truth about objective properties is not relative and there can not be faultless disagreement about their instantiation.

**2. The disagreement is genuine but not faultless.** This means that either Emma or Harriet must be wrong. That could be because the instantiation of funniness is objective; independent of what Emma, Harriet or anyone else thinks. That, however, does not exclude the possibility of some other properties being mind-dependent for their instantiation. Another option is that funniness is fixed to the judgments of one person or group, say Emma. Then it is still mind-dependent in the sense that it is designed to follow Emma's judgments of funniness and thus different from a property attribution that tracks something independent from any mental activity, such as Grover's height.

**3. The disagreement is faultless but not genuine.** There are many ways to account for this but the most promising is indexical relativism. As

described above, a subject-relative property can be considered mind-dependent in a sense in which some other properties are not.

The conclusion is that whatever we end up thinking about the possibility of faultless disagreement, there are ways to account for a difference between subjective and objective properties.

### **4.3. The Lure of Subjectivism**

After the above consideration of what threatens the existence of subjective properties, it is now in order to turn to the others: objective properties. Are there compelling reasons to deny their existence?

The most likely suspect for a theory that would entail a rejection of objectively instantiated properties would be some version of subjectivism. Now, subjectivist theories come in many forms and flavors, but what they share is the claim that the world is mind-dependent in some sense or another which a corresponding objectivist would claim was mind-independent. Surely, some of these senses of mind-dependence must entail that what properties things have is always a matter of what we think. On an account involving such a view, there can be no objectively instantiated properties. Is there perhaps a subjectivist account that provides us with a compelling reason to reject objective properties?

There is no doubt that we attribute various properties to objects around us, and it so happens that a property will never come under discussion unless we humans bring our attention to it at some point. Furthermore, our talk of properties is restricted by the way it suits us to classify things. Therefore, when

we assert that an object has a certain property, we are in part throwing light upon our own classification system. It should be no surprise that this would prompt some claims to the effect that properties are constructed by us. On the surface of it, it seems that if all properties are by their nature human constructs, subjective, or mind-dependent, there can hardly be any objective properties. The term *objective property* must be an oxymoron. However, we must bear in mind that there can be more than one sense of “objective property” in play. The distinction I am considering in my project has to do with property *instantiation*; with whether properties are instantiated subjectively or objectively. The view that the world’s structure is subjective has to do with property *existence*. One of the things I will consider here is whether subjectivism about property existence entails subjectivism about property instantiation. Below, I will take a closer look at some subjectivist accounts about the structure of the world and the motivations behind them. I will consider whether these accounts provide us with a good reason to deny that properties can be objectively instantiated.

#### **4.3.1. Egalitarianism**

Why is it that some properties seem to make more sense to us than others? We divide the world up in certain ways and attribute certain properties to things but not others. We speak of green cars but not of grue incars. The realist answer to why is that some things and some properties are more natural than others or somehow more eligible. The world comes pre-divided into objects and properties and our job is to figure out ways to track them. Let



us leave the objects aside and focus on the properties. The realist answer, then, to why we speak of greenness but not of grueness is that greenness is for some reason or another more eligible than grueness to be a property, whether it is because it is more natural or whatever it is called. The notion of greenness comes closer to tracking the way the world actually is, independently of us, than the notion of grueness<sup>28</sup>.

Some philosophers reject the realist explanation for why we privilege some properties over others. The reason, they say, is not that the privileged properties really are more natural or eligible independently of how we think of them. The privileging is done by us, because of the way we think of the world. This point is made, for instance, by Mary Kate McGowan in her paper "Privileging Properties" (2001), where she proposes an account she calls subjectivist. Among other examples, McGowan considers SAT analogy questions such as "A hand is to a glove as (a) a hat is to a head; (b) a couch is to a chair; (c) a foot is to a shoe; (d) a hoop is to a goat." It could be argued that (d) was the correct answer, given that hands and hoops are both (in English) represented by words beginning with the letter 'h' and gloves and goats are represented by words beginning with 'g'. Presumably, there are ways to argue for each of the answers. However, it is clear to most of us that the "correct" answer is (c). In this case, it is taken for granted that certain properties are more important than others, and that provides us with the correct answer. But why do some properties count more than others? McGowan's answer is that the reason lies with us; we are responsible for

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<sup>28</sup> Such a view is held by Lewis (1983; 1986). For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Hirsch (1993).

making those properties more important. We, and the way we think, are the reason why some properties are privileged.

The privileged properties are those that determine the structure of the world:

The subjectivist...maintains that since we are fixing which properties are structure-defining, we are partially determining the world's structure. That is, since we somehow determine which properties individuate the world into the things and kinds of things eligible to be referred to, we are (in a sense) thereby determining which things and kinds of things there are. For a subjectivist, therefore, the world's structure(s) depends essentially on us (p. 10).

The idea seems to be that there are all kinds of property candidates out there, greenness, grueness, being-the-Queen-of-England-or-a-chocolate-glazed-donut-about-to-be-eaten-by-a-cop, etc., and in some sense they *exist* independently of us. The part that is up to us is to prioritize those pre-existing property candidates; to determine which of them get to count and thereby be parts of making up the world's structure. Which of those property candidates are important to us or sufficiently relevant to us to catch our attention is up to us. This is a version of egalitarianism about properties. All properties are created equal, so to speak. The reason why some properties become privileged is that we privilege them; they do not come pre-privileged from nature.

A view similar to McGowan's is expressed by Catherine Z. Elgin (1995). Elgin focuses on the properties considered by scientists. She argues that if it is supposed to be independent from us which properties are natural, we have no way of knowing that the properties considered by the science we do are even close to being the natural ones. Not only the properties but our means of evaluating them would be inaccessible to us if they were objectively

determined. While there is a strong anti-skeptical element<sup>29</sup> in Elgin's account, egalitarianism plays a role as well:

Lewis's natural properties constitute a metaphysical aristocracy. They are the elite whose standing derives from the refinement of their antecedents, not their contribution to the cognitive enterprise. But science, I suggest, is a meritocracy. [...] For the purposes of science, all schemes of organization that enable us to make maximally good sense of things are equally worthy, and are preferable to any scheme that at its best enables us to make less good sense than its rivals. And making good sense has to be measured by its own standards; for we have no other (p. 299).

What makes most sense, says Elgin, is to consider the properties examined by science natural; not because they come to us that way, but because being the subject of natural science makes them so. This is an answer analogous to Euthyphro's answer to Socrates' question: an action is good because the gods like it; not the other way around: "Nothing confers naturalness on properties but their contribution to successful science. Properties are natural, then, only because natural science favors them. Naturalness of properties is an output of successful inquiry, not an input into it" (p. 300).

The view I have described here entails that our thoughts and practices make up the properties of the world in a certain sense, which makes it a version of subjectivism. However, that certain sense in which we make up the properties has limits. It does not entail that the properties around us would not exist *at all* if it were not for us. Our contribution consists in awarding certain properties special status, so to speak, or perhaps in turning certain features into properties. It is not entailed that determining when and where those properties are instantiated is within our power. Hence, believing that what we

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<sup>29</sup> I discuss anti-skepticism in more detail below.

perceive in the world around us, how scientific experiments turn out, and more generally “what the world is like” is independent of us is consistent with McGowan’s and Elgin’s versions of subjectivism. Their subjectivism about the structure of the world is consistent with objectivism about the objects of human perceptions and research, and about the instantiation of the subjectively privileged properties. McGowan describes her view as follows:

Determining which properties are privileged is distinct from determining where and when properties are instantiated. The objectivist and the subjectivist disagree about what determines the structure-defining status of certain properties. Neither position implies anything about what determines where and when such properties are instantiated (2001, p. 11).

It seems perfectly consistent with this view that some properties be such that it is not up to us when they are instantiated, i.e. that they are objectively instantiated. Therefore, an account motivated by egalitarianism does not pose a threat to the notion of objective properties.

#### **4.3.2. Pluralism**

One of Hilary Putnam’s reasons for rejecting metaphysical realism is what he calls conceptual relativity. He describes conceptual relativity with a fictional example of two characters to whom he refers as Carnap and the Polish logician (1987, pp. 18-20). The characters are asked how many objects there are in a world with three individuals. Carnap’s answer is that there are three:  $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ , and  $x_3$ . The Polish logician’s answer, however, is that there are seven:  $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ ,  $x_3$ ,  $x_1+x_2$ ,  $x_2+x_3$ ,  $x_1+x_3$ , and  $x_1+x_2+x_3$ . Each of them is right, given their respective conceptual scheme. Hence, the truth about the number

of objects in the world is conceptually relative, says Putnam. There is no truth about how many objects there are, or the correct way to define an object, independent of a conceptual scheme:

The suggestion ... is that what is (by commonsense standards) the same situation can be described in many different ways, depending on how we use the words. The situation does not itself legislate how words like "object," "entity," and "exist" must be used. What is wrong with the notion of objects existing "independently" of conceptual schemes is that there are no standards for the use of even the logical notions apart from conceptual choices" (1988, p. 114).

Putnam's reaction is to reject metaphysical realism, the view that (at least some of) the objects and properties of the world are independent of our thoughts about them. How exactly this rejection is to be understood is not obvious. However, the idea seems to be that a conceptual scheme is a way of carving out the world's properties. It is something that runs deeper than, say, a system of measurement. If Carnap and the Polish logician are looking at a pencil and one says it is 6 inches long while the other says it is 15 centimeters, they are not disagreeing in any interesting way<sup>30</sup>. Their disagreement about the number of objects must run deeper than that.

Another famous anti-realist example is Nelson Goodman's claim that stars (as everything else) are made by us (Goodman 1978). They are "made rather than found". Goodman's view (which he calls *irrealism*) is a form of relativism; two conflicting statements can both be true at the same time. He claims that all facts, just as the whole world, are made by us.

What the views of Putnam and Goodman share is the idea that there is more than one way to give a correct description of the world<sup>31</sup>. Both of them

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<sup>30</sup> 6 inches are roughly the same length as 15 centimeters.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the differences between Putnam's and Goodman's versions of subjectivism, including the role of pluralism therein, see Cox 2003.

subscribe to a view we can call ontological pluralism. According to ontological pluralism, conflicting descriptions of what the world is like, or of what things there are in the world, can be true at the same time, such as Carnap and the Polish logician's accounts of the number of objects. There is no ultimately correct account of the world, superior to the other accounts. Many different accounts are equally true. Given a certain conceptual scheme, it is true that there are three objects in the world and given another it is true that there are seven objects in the world. Given a certain conceptual scheme, or *world*, as Goodman puts it, it is true that there are stars, but given another it is not true that there are stars.

Ontological pluralism is sometimes described as the view that the world has no particular structure or features independently of the structure or features that we attribute to it. Independently of our thoughts, the world is a turkey without joints, a formless blob, an amorphous lump; a giant piece of tofu that we give form and flavor with the cutting, cooking, and seasonings of the day. The world does not come fully formed, neatly divided into objects of various sorts, ready for us to discover. We are the ones responsible for dividing it into objects. No matter how we divide it, there is always some other possible way of dividing it that would have been equally good. The view opposite to pluralism, then, would be the view that the world does come with structure and features, and pre-divided into objects before we encounter it and start applying our conceptual resources onto it. The description of how the world is before we encounter it (or independently of our conceptions of it) would then be the ultimately correct description of it.

Exactly how to interpret views such as those of Putnam and Goodman seems to be a constant matter of dispute. How much should we, for instance,

read into Goodman's words about our making the stars? He can hardly mean that we literally make them in the same sense as we would make a ball out of clay. Sam Page (2006) has argued that we should take Putnam, Goodman, and other anti-realists to be arguing against what he calls *individuating independence*. On that reading, when Goodman says that we make the stars, he does not mean that the stars are causally dependent on us (i.e. that we caused the existence of their physical matter) or that they are structurally dependent on us (i.e. that the way a particular star is shaped, its mass, or its size are somehow figments of our mental activities). What he means is that what it is to be a star or the fact that a star is one object rather than, say, two objects (two star-halves), is dependent on our thinking.

If we go with Page's reading, ontological pluralism does not entail that the world has no structure independently of us. It has all kinds of features. However, what ontological pluralism means then is that the world is not divided up into objects except by us. This also holds for things such as properties. While some of the features of the world may be independent of us, ours is the job of constructing properties out of them. This means that the facts that there are such things as being 160 cm tall, being a dog, or being a granite rock are dependent on our dividing the world up that way.

Is this view a threat to the notion of objectively instantiated property? I think not. Even though it is up to us which features of the world make up a certain property, such as what it constitutes to be 160 cm tall, and it is up to us how the world "stuff" is divided up into objects, then given that way of dividing up the world, it is not up to us which individual objects have these particular features. Or at least it does not follow that it is up to us (of course we could decide to make a 160 cm tall statue, but that is a different matter). On this

kind of view the objectively instantiated properties would be those that are instantiated on the bases of features that occur independently of human thoughts. Subjectively instantiated properties, on the other hand, would be those whose instantiation is not based on clearly defined features of the objects or the world but rather on a subject's reaction to such features.

But what if we do not go along with Page's conservative reading of the anti-realists? What if ontological pluralism involves the more radical claim that the world has no structure or features what so ever independently of what structure and features we assign to it? Then whatever features we consider the constituents of a property such as being 160 cm tall are also made up by us. And in that case, there seems to be nothing left that is independent of our mental activity and could determine which things have the relevant features and which things do not. If it is entirely up to us not only that the property of being 160 cm tall exists, and it is also the case that the world is no particular way independently of our thinking, it must be equally up to us whether a given case counts as an instance of the property. There are no independent features left on which it can be based. Mind-independent instantiation of a property must have some basis in mind-independent features of the object in question.

The upshot is that for there to be objectively instantiated properties, there must be some mind-independent way for the world to be on which they can be based. That way does not have to be on the level of properties or objects; it can be more basic. But there must be something. Hence, a radical interpretation of ontological pluralism, let us call it radical subjectivism, is inconsistent with the notion of an objectively instantiated property. The question now, of course, is whether radical subjectivism is something we should be considering in the first place. Do we have a reason to adopt such a



view? It is not clear to me that we do, but it is clear that we have many reasons not to be radical subjectivists. It seems to be an important element in our common sense way of thinking that not everything in the world is a matter of our thinking about it (really, if it were, why didn't I think my way to that Ph.D. a long time ago?). It seems to be an important element in our thinking about the world to think that there is at least something about it, on some level, that is independent of our thoughts<sup>32</sup>. This may not provide ultimate proof against radical subjectivism, but it does give us a reason to be wary of it. Apart from this, it is not even clear who the proponents of radical subjectivism are (if they exist).

Wanting to be a pluralist is not a sufficient reason to become a radical subjectivist. As discussed above, pluralism can involve a more moderate form of subjectivism. Furthermore, some say that ontological pluralism is consistent with metaphysical realism. Horgan and Timmons (2002) argue that by rejecting a direct correspondence theory of truth and adopting a theory of *indirect* correspondence based on what they call contextual semantics, we can make pluralism and realism live happily together<sup>33</sup>.

I believe I have shown here that if ontological pluralism is the motivation that tickles our fancy, we do not need to give up objective properties to fulfill it. That, of course, does not say much about the general appeal of pluralism.

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<sup>32</sup> Among countless arguments to this effect from one aspect or another, some of the most recent can be found in Nolt (2004), Sider (forthcoming), and Miller (2002).

<sup>33</sup> A similar argument can be found in Cortens (2002), although Cortens claim about the full compatibility of ontological pluralism with metaphysical realism is somewhat weaker. For reasoning in what we could call the opposite direction, i.e. that because of the flaws of ontological pluralism, ontological deflationists should look at other options, see Eklund (forthcoming).

### 4.3.3. Becoming Doubtfree

It has sometimes been considered a drawback of metaphysical realism that it makes skepticism possible. If the world's structure is independent of how we perceive it or think about it, then it seems a possibility that we might be systematically wrong about it. Sven Rosenkranz (2003) describes it so that realists are committed at least to the possibility of recognition-transcendent truths. If there is something that is independent of our knowing about it or thinking about it, it must be possible for us to be mistaken about it or even even to fail to know about it at all. This invites the possibility of our being wrong about a great deal of things that we think we know.

A possible reaction to this invitation to skepticism is to reject the existence of the mind-independent. If the notion of mind-independence is considered meaningless (as it has been by some) or unperceived existence declared impossible, there is no room for worry about our being in error about it. As some say: the only way to make sure that the job gets properly done is to do it yourself. Avoid delegation. If all that exists is a product of our own mental activity, we do not have to worry about the possible results of some activity beyond our control.

We might say that removing the mind-independent removes the possibility of underdetermination. We have the data and that is all we need. The true theory behind the data is the theory we construct. Elgin (1995) argues that it makes no sense for it to be possible that science is wrong about which properties are real or natural. That would make it possible for what we call *natural* science to be, in fact, *unnatural* science as it would be left open for the properties science really deals with to be unnatural. The only thing that makes sense, says Elgin, is to stipulate that the properties with which science

deals are natural properties. Worrying about the possibility of our being wrong about those properties should not be in the picture. In a similar vein, Sophie R. Allen (2002) argues that what she calls classificatory skepticism is a problem for metaphysical realism.

So, should we abandon realism in order to avoid the possibility of doubt? If we do, must we also give up on the idea of objectively instantiated properties? Let us first consider the second question. As I have discussed above, whether objectively instantiated properties are consistent with subjectivism depends on how far the subjectivism is taken. Presumably, if we are to remove every trace of possibility of any kind of doubt about anything, we must become the most extreme subjectivists. That means adopting the view that there is nothing true about anything in the world independently of how we believe it to be. Surely, that would include truths about the instantiation of properties or about the occurrence of features on which properties would be based. However, nothing suggests that Elgin or Allen have that kind of view in mind. Their concern is the possibility of skepticism about the way the world is structured or what kind of properties there are in the world. That still leaves room for some features on which the properties are based to be independent of our thoughts. We can still delegate a bit even though we get to be in charge of management.

#### **4.3.4. Social Construction**

Humans are social animals and it seems clear that the power of human society over our way of thinking is considerable, to say the least. A number of

the things we use on a daily basis are obviously constructs of society and so are a great many concepts as well that we use to classify and categorize. This is also true of some properties or ways of classification that we tend to take as self-evident and/or “natural.” Notions like *gender* and *race* come to mind. Given that we are so enmeshed in a web of social constructs, it may be tempting to conclude that surely, that is all there is. Our only means of access to the properties of which we speak is through our concepts of them, and how do we come up with those concepts, really, if not by social construction?

If we suppose that all our property concepts are socially constructed, there are still a number of questions that must be answered in order to determine the possibility of objectively instantiated properties. What does it mean for something to be socially constructed? Is everything that is socially constructed mind-dependent or subjective? If so, in what sense is it mind-dependent? After all, people seem to mean all kinds of things when they say that something is socially constructed.

In his book *The Social Construction of What?* (Hacking 1999), Ian Hacking describes a social construction account of phenomenon *X* as follows: “the existence or character of *X* is not determined by the nature of things. *X* is not inevitable. *X* was brought into existence or shaped by social events, forces, history, all of which could well have been different” (pp. 6-7). Hacking mentions that in many cases, this basic thesis is accompanied by the view that *X* is bad and even that we would be better off without it, but these additional claims are not essential to an account of social construction.

Our conceptual system, including our ways of sorting things into properties, seems to be a good candidate for what Sally Haslanger (Haslanger 1995) calls *weak pragmatic construction*, and defines as a distinction *partly*

determined by social factors (p. 100). The fact that various social factors come into play in determining our terms, concepts, classification systems and so on does not automatically preclude us from succeeding in using these terms to refer to things, properties or distinctions that exist or are instantiated independently of us. As Haslanger puts it:

In cases of weak pragmatic construction our choices of descriptive terms, classificatory schemes, etc., are conditioned by social factors (values, interests, history, etc.), but of course this is compatible with those terms' and classifications' capturing real facts and distinctions. The world provides us with more facts and distinctions than we could ever know what to do with; acknowledging that what ones we bother to notice or name is largely determined by our background and interests does not impugn in any general way the accuracy of our attributions (p. 101).

It is not too hard to accept that the way we speak of and think about the properties of things is socially constructed, both in the sense Hacking describes, and in Haslanger's sense of weak pragmatic construction. Our concepts must be influenced by all kinds of social factors and it is quite plausible that they could have been different in a different environment with a different history and different social practices. But as can be gathered from Haslanger herself in a more recent paper (Haslanger 2003), her account of weak pragmatic construction does not qualify as social constructionist on Hacking's account. According to Hacking, there is an important precondition common to all social constructionists about *X*: "(0) In the present state of affairs, *X* is taken for granted, *X* appears to be inevitable" (Hacking 1999, p. 12). It is quite obvious to most of us that our ideas about things, including the concepts we form and the ways of classifying things, are influenced by social factors and that they could have been different under other circumstances. For something to qualify as a social constructionist account on Hacking's terms, it

must refer to something more controversially social than our conceptual system, such as the properties to which those concepts refer.

I do not think this failure of Haslanger's weak pragmatic construction of conforming to Hacking's account has any devastating effects. It may simply indicate that Hacking's definition fails to cover all the options. Haslanger's notion of weak pragmatic construction can still be non-trivial. Someone who denies the weak pragmatic construction of concept  $X$  is someone who claims that  $X$  gives us a perfect replicating picture of how something is in the world independently of us. It not only tracks a property of the world,  $P$ , but represents  $P$  exactly the way it is independently of the way we think of  $P$  and gives the only possible correct picture of  $P$ . Someone who thinks this might still agree that we *could* have had different ideas about  $P$  under different circumstances, but presumably it would then follow that in such a case we would be wrong about the way  $P$  is.

It should be clear that even though our conceptual system is weakly pragmatically constructed, there is plenty of room left for at least some of the properties of things to be objectively instantiated. Even though the way we conceive of a property may always be influenced by social factors, it is still possible for those conceptions of ours to refer to properties of the world that things have whether we think they do or not. Furthermore, there could still be properties unknown to us that were objectively instantiated.

But what about a stronger sense of social construction, such as a sense under which Hacking's precondition is fulfilled? Suppose that not only our property concepts but the properties themselves are socially constructed. In that case, I think we have come back to ontological pluralism of some kind and everything said above about pluralism should hold. If the properties are

constructed out of some features of the world that are independent of our mental activities, there can be objectively instantiated properties. If not, there cannot be objectively instantiated properties, but the subjectivism entailed is quite extreme.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

The threats to a division into subjectively and objectively instantiated properties are not devastating ones. The notion of subjectively instantiated properties may look doubtful if it requires relying on the possibility of faultless disagreement. True disagreement where neither party is wrong seems to require some way of accounting for relative truth or relative facts. And some might say that this is the only way to make a property subjectively instantiated. However, as I have shown, there are other ways to find a basis on which to consider a property subjectively instantiated, even though we may find the notion of relative fact or relative truth dubious. A subjectively instantiated property can simply be any property that is instantiated *because* someone thinks it is.

While various versions of subjectivism have their appeals, it takes adherence to quite an extreme version to deny the possibility of an objectively instantiated property. Even though we consider ourselves to be the builders of the world, we can still think of some things as obtaining independently of our experiences as long as we stick with some consistency in architecture and some mind-independent building materials. Therefore, metaphysical realism is

not a necessary precondition for a distinction between subjective and objective properties.



## CHAPTER 5

### ARE SENSORY PROPERTIES SUBJECTIVE OR OBJECTIVE?

#### 5.1. Sensory Properties

In previous chapters I have argued for a distinction between subjective and objective properties on the basis of how they are instantiated. In this chapter, I will examine where sensory properties fall on the basis of such a distinction.

I argue that rather than thinking of sensory properties as either objective or subjective, there is a way to think of them as both at the same time. Namely, by outlining the distinction as a continuum, ranging from *entirely objective* to *entirely subjective* and putting sensory properties somewhere in the middle. I will give an account below of how this can be accomplished.

Before reaching this conclusion about sensory properties, I discuss two preliminary issues. The first has to do with how we think of color and what color seems to be. While I disagree with both color primitivism and error theories about color, I believe such theories reflect something that is important to consider. Namely, that we seem to want to think of color both as subjective and as objective. The second issue is the question of whether sensory properties should all be treated similarly or whether there are reasons to think of, say, some of them as subjective and others as objective. I argue that they should be regarded as equal in this respect.

## 5.2. Color

Over the past few decades, the nature of color has been much discussed among philosophers. One of the important issues has been whether and how colors are subjective or objective properties. Views such as color dispositionalism, color physicalism, and color subjectivism have been put forth. While I will not cover those views here, I will discuss two views about the nature of color that I think express something important. The views I have in mind are error theories about color (or color projectivism), and color primitivism. While I disagree with both, I believe they do show us something important about the way we conceive of color, which in turn indicates what is reasonable to think that colors are.

In his paper "How to Speak of the Colors"<sup>34</sup>, Mark Johnston gives a list of (what he considers to be) our core beliefs about color. Core beliefs about color are, according to Johnston, beliefs we have about color resulting from our visual experience and that are such that a property of which they are not true cannot be color, i.e. it must be some other property. Among those beliefs is one Johnston calls *Revelation* and describes as follows: "The intrinsic nature of canary yellow is fully revealed by a standard visual experience as of a canary yellow thing" (1992, p. 138). The idea is that via our visual experiences of a color we get to know all there is to know about the nature of the color. Johnston claims that while we are tempted to believe *Revelation*, its inconsistency with some of the other of our core beliefs about color shows that we must abandon it. In order to save as many of the other core beliefs as possible, *Revelation* must be sacrificed. Even though it may be tempting to believe that the full nature of color is directly revealed to us in visual

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<sup>34</sup> Johnston (1992).

experience, it just cannot be the case that it is true. However, Johnston argues that there is a grain of truth in *Revelation* and he holds what he calls a qualified version of it: Visual experience does not reveal to us everything there is to know about the nature of color, but it still reveals to us important parts of its nature, such as similarity and difference relations between colors.

While Johnston thinks *Revelation* must be abandoned, there are others who subscribe to it. *Revelation* also seems to be what Bertrand Russell thinks we get to know about a color sense-datum by acquaintance with it: “so far as concerns knowledge of the colour itself, as opposed to knowledge of truths about it, I know the colour perfectly and completely when I see it, and no further knowledge of it itself is even theoretically possible” (1912, p. 47). But believing this of sense-data is different from believing it of colors as properties of objects.

According to David Lewis, people tend to have a belief such as *Revelation* about qualia: “Folk psychology says, I think, that we identify the qualia of our experiences. We know exactly what they are — and that in an uncommonly demanding and literal sense of ‘knowing what’ (1995, p. 141). Lewis argues, however, that if materialism is true, this folk psychological belief cannot be true.

Those who think that *Revelation* is the standard, common sense belief about color can be divided in two camps. On the one hand, we have those who take it as a true belief, i.e. who think not only that *Revelation* is the standard, everyday view, but also that we are right to believe it. According to such a view, colors really *are* simple, mind-independent properties that are

exactly like our phenomenal experiences of them<sup>35</sup>. I will be calling that view color primitivism. On the other hand, we have those who think our standard, everyday view of color to be false. In other words, that we do believe something like *Revelation* about color, but that the objects around us do not have any corresponding properties. I refer to this view as an error theory<sup>36</sup>. Both primitivism and color error theories have, in my opinion, some serious flaws. Furthermore, I doubt that *Revelation* really is the common sense belief about color. However, I think that *Revelation* and how the two views that rely on it fail, show us something important about color. I will now go on to explaining how and why.

### 5.2.1. Primitivism

Good examples of *Revelation* about color, or the view I call color primitivism, are the account McGinn presents in his paper “Another Look at Color” (1996) and Campbell’s view, which he calls the “Simple View”, or “transparency”. Discussing color, Campbell says: “Still, if we take the appearances at face value, we will take it that we are seeing the properties of objects in virtue of which they have the potential to produce experiences of colour. The perception reveals the whole character of the property to us” (1993, p. 257). Campbell argues that (among other things) since the transparency thesis holds, colors can neither be microphysical properties nor

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<sup>35</sup> Examples of color primitivists are Campbell (1993), McGinn (1996), Strawson (1989), Stroud (2000), and De Anna (2002).

<sup>36</sup> Examples of error theorists are Boghossian and Velleman (1989), Mackie (1976), and Hardin (1988).

dispositions to cause experiences: “A simpler view of colours thus remains in play. On this view, redness, for example, is not a disposition to produce experiences in us. It is, rather, the ground of such a disposition. But that is not because redness is a microphysical property—the real nature of the property is, rather, transparent to us” (p. 258). So according to Campbell, colors are simple properties that are exactly as presented by our color experiences. McGinn rejects the dispositional view of color for similar reasons: “we just do not see colors as dispositions to cause experiences” (1996, p. 538), and finds any account of color unacceptable unless it claims that colors are exactly as we perceive them to be.

A similar view is endorsed by Galen Strawson in his discussion of the meaning of color words:

...any adequate account of the meaning of colour words must capture the fundamental point that, whatever else they are, colour words are words for properties whose essential nature as properties can be and is fully revealed in sensory (and indeed visual) experience, given only the qualitative character that sensory (visual) experience has (1989, p. 213).

So, according to color primitivism, colors are intrinsic properties of the objects we see. And these intrinsic properties are exactly as we perceive them; i.e. they are just like the sensation we have when we see them, just the way they are phenomenologically presented to us. Our perceptions give us direct access to colors exactly the way they are. The phenomenology of color vision is to be taken at face value: as we attend to our experiences of colors, we can infer that *exactly this* is how the colors are.

Many arguments have been made against color primitivism. Among other things, it has been argued that it makes it impossible for colors to be the causes of our color experiences, that it makes it very unclear what kind of

properties colors should be, and that it is simply based on wrong assumptions about the way color vision works. But what I take to be the most serious problem with color primitivism is the idea of mind-independent, intrinsic properties to which we have direct perceptual access.

Jim Edwards (1998; 2003) has argued in a powerful way that primitivism is incompatible with semantic externalism<sup>37</sup>. I think the thought expressed by Edwards's argument is very important and that a similar point can be made in a different way. But first, let us look at Edwards's argument:

Edwards asks us to imagine a planet he calls Z-land. In Z-land, everything is just like it is on our planet, the grass is just the way it is here and so on, except for one thing: the light in Z-land consists of Z-rays that have a color inverting effect. So, when someone in Z-land is looking at the grass, it looks just the way red things look here. The inhabitants of Z-land say that grass is green\* and that poppy flowers are red\*. If we assume that color primitivism holds, the sense of the term green\* is that it applies to things that have the property we call redness (because the sense is determined by the Z-landers' experiences of things such as grass), yet the reference of green\* is the property we call greenness (remember that the grass in Z-land is just like here; it's just that the Z-rays make it look different). This means that there is a mismatch between sense and reference and the truth conditions of "This is green\*" cannot be determined as they differ depending on whether we rely on the sense or the reference of 'green\*'. This does not happen if primitivism is abandoned, as in that case the sense and reference can be defined so that they match. For instance, the sense of 'green\*' could then be "being disposed

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<sup>37</sup> Arguments against Edwards 1998, to which Edwards responds in his 2003, can be found in De Anna 2002.

to look red to standard perceivers in Z-land” which does not conflict with the reference being the property of greenness (2003, p. 110).

The important point suggested by Edwards’s argument is that for something to be mind-independent, there must be a way of separating it from how it is experienced. In order for the greenness of the grass to be intrinsic to the grass and independent of our (or the Z-landers’) perceptions of grass, it must be freed from the requirement of being just like those perceptions. If greenness is truly mind-independent, it must be possible for it to fail under some circumstances to produce any sensations of green. Something that is mind-independent can only contingently produce a certain kind of subjective experience; that is what makes it mind-independent. Defining greenness as mind-independent and at the same time by definition identical to the subjective experience it contingently produces simply does not work. While Edwards’s argument is phrased in linguistic terms, I think it expresses the same idea as I am describing. If the reference of a term is externally determined, it is determined independently of the subject’s experiences. Hence it cannot be defined in the same way as the internally determined sense of the term.

Let me state another version of the argument that does not rely on semantic externalism:

Imagine Zoë the Z-lander, an avid color primitivist. When she looks at grass, her experience is phenomenally the same as that of her earthly counterpart when she looks at a red poppy. This means that Zoë believes that grass has an intrinsic property that is exactly like this experience of hers. But remember that the grass in Z-land is intrinsically just like the grass on Earth; it’s those blasted Z-rays that make it look different. Assuming that we Earthlings have it right about what color grass is; then Zoë must be wrong.

The grass in Z-land does not have an intrinsic property that is just like Zoë's experience of it (on the other hand, poppies do, but Zoë does not know that). This seems to mean that an error theory about color is true in Z-land: the Z-landers are systematically mistaken about colors. But saying that the Z-landers are the ones who are mistaken and not Earthlings seems completely arbitrary. If greenness is mind-independent, then grass' being green has nothing to do with us Earthlings rather than Z-landers, so why assume we would be the lucky ones who have it right?<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the rays of our Sun are those that invert the colors. Hence, we cannot even distinguish for sure between primitivism and an error theory.

While I find the idea of mind-independent properties being identical with subjective experiences problematic, I am much more open to primitivism about subjective properties; properties whose instantiation is mind-dependent. Suppose for a moment that colors were mind-dependent so that an object would be green if and only if someone perceived it as green, i.e. had phenomenally green responses to it. Then there does not seem to be a problem associated with assuming that greenness is exactly like our sensations of green. Grass is green on Earth, at least during the day for most people, and poppies are green in Z-land for most people most of the time. It is not a problem for the property to be exactly like our perceptions of it when it is our perceptions who cause it to be instantiated anyway. Having direct perceptual access to something that our perceptions make up does not seem too problematic.

My conclusion is that while primitivism might be true for some subjective properties, it cannot be true for mind-independent properties. Note that this is

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<sup>38</sup> A related criticism can be found in Chalmers 2006, pp. 67-68.



not the issue of whether we can know all there is to know about the nature of the property in question. In some cases, we know everything about what constitutes an instantiation of a property because we have made and/or defined it ourselves, yet the property can be objectively instantiated. An example of that could be the property of being legal (let us suppose that it were never open to interpretation whether an act was legal or not). Obviously, that does not make the property of being legal exactly like the phenomenal content of our experiences of legality. There is no such phenomenal content and no such experience. Assuming that a property is exactly like how we *think* of it does not amount to *Revelation* about it, and the view that we are correct to assume that does not amount to primitivism. We may judge or infer that something is legal, but there is no such thing as the way it is to perceive something legal. *Revelation* and primitivism are only applicable to properties that can be associated with a sensation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Zoltán Jakab (2006) argues that what he calls *conceptual revelation* is true of shape properties. The idea is that our perception of variously shaped objects accompanied with intellectual reflection is sufficient for revealing the nature of shape properties. In this respect, he contrasts shapes with colors, about which conceptual revelation is not true. That is, perception and intellectual reflection alone do not yield an uncontroversial account of what colors are. If colors are microphysical properties or some kind of properties subject to color science, it is clear that regular color perception does not come close to revealing their nature. But how does my claim that primitivism cannot be true of mind-independent properties fare on this account? Is Jakab endorsing primitivism about shapes?

The notion of conceptual revelation does not amount to primitivism or the kind of perceptual or sensory revelation involved in that theory. Jakab is not claiming that shape properties are exactly identical to the phenomenal content of our shape experiences. On his account, visual perception (or any perception) alone does not reveal the nature of shapes; reflection is necessary as well. Hence, Jakab's notion of conceptual revelation is not the same as the notion of visual revelation involved in color primitivism. The difference between the two is important. While conceptual revelation of some objective properties seems possible, the argument against color primitivism presented above applies to visual revelation (or sensory revelation of any kind).

### 5.2.2. Error Theories

According to error theorists about color, we believe *Revelation*, that colors are mind-independent properties whose nature is revealed in visual perception, but we are mistaken in that belief. The objects around us do not have any mind-independent properties just like our sensations of color; therefore we are guilty of a systematic error. I have just argued that there are no such mind-independent properties as those described by *Revelation*. Does that mean that I think an error theory of color is true?

The short answer is *no*. The long answer is that I think there are a couple of reasons why an error theory of color is not true. Let me elaborate:

In his paper "Perception and the Fall from Eden" (2006), David Chalmers argues that our experiences have several different representational contents. One of them is their phenomenal content, which Chalmers describes as follows: "A phenomenal content of a perceptual experience is a representational content that is determined by the experience's phenomenal character" (p. 50). He defines representational content as a condition of satisfaction of the experience in question, and phenomenal character as what it is like to have the experience (*Ibid.*). According to Chalmers, if the objects we see around us had properties that were exactly like the phenomenal content of our color experiences, these properties would be what he calls *perfect colors* and our experiences of them would be *perfectly veridical*. However, things do not have perfect colors (if they did, color primitivism would be true) and our color experiences are not perfectly veridical (pp. 66-69).

Even though our color experiences are not perfectly veridical, they can be *imperfectly veridical*, says Chalmers. They are imperfectly veridical if the objects we see have properties that are good enough to serve as matches for

the phenomenal content, even though they do not bear a perfect resemblance to it. So, instead of a red apple having the property of *perfect redness* it could be the case that it has the property of *imperfect redness*. The route Chalmers takes to accomplish this involves dividing the phenomenal content into two stages, so that an experience has two phenomenal contents. One is what he calls *Edenic content*, which can only be satisfied by the object's having a perfectly resembling property, and the other is a Fregean content, a mode of presentation of the object and its properties which is determined by the Edenic content (p. 72). An experience of redness is veridical if and only if the object of the experience possesses a property that matches perfect redness, i.e. it normally causes phenomenally red experience. It is, however, not perfectly veridical unless the object has a property perfectly matching the Edenic content. Instead, it is *imperfectly* veridical, which is really all we can hope for.

This is what Chalmers calls the two stage view of phenomenal content. I believe this two stage view is one way an error theory about color can be avoided. Even though the objects around us do not have properties that are perfect resemblances of the way they are phenomenologically presented to us, or what Chalmers would call Edenic content, they can have properties that serve well enough as matches for those experiences. As long as our color terms successfully and consistently refer to properties that objects actually have, it does not seem necessary for those properties to perfectly resemble the phenomenal content of our color experiences.

And here is another reason why I do not think an error theory about color is true: I do not think we actually believe *Revelation* about color. If we sincerely believed that our color terms referred to objective properties perfectly resembling the phenomenal content of our color experiences, and then the

objects around us did not have any such properties, there would be an error in play. Our beliefs about color would be systematically false. But why should we assume that we believe *Revelation*?

Imagine a young child's drawing of her mother. The drawing does not look much like the mother; it shows a squiggly stick figure. However, we accept the drawing as a representation of the child's mother. Presumably, the reason is that we can account for an appropriate causal chain<sup>40</sup> between the mother and what we see in the picture and that chain is sufficiently strong to make the squiggly stick figure on the sheet of paper a true representation of the person in question.

If the child believed the drawing of her mother showed exactly the way she really looked, there would be an error involved. But that would have to be a very literal belief. We will even accept claims such as "this is how I see her" as not involving an error. Similarly, if we literally believed that grass had a property that was exactly like the way greenness is phenomenologically presented to us, we would believe *Revelation* and be in error. But the belief that grass has a property that is presented to us in this particular way does not entail the belief that the property literally is exactly as we picture it. We can believe that the way greenness is phenomenologically presented to us is representative of a property in the grass without believing that the property of the grass really is exactly like that. And why should we believe the latter?

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<sup>40</sup> Of course, not just any causal chain will do in this respect. The mother could for instance cause the child to draw a picture representing something completely different. I take it that in addition to the causal chain some degree of resemblance of the picture to the mother may be needed, as well as an intent on the child's behalf to have the picture represent her mother.

### 5.2.3. A Resemblance Thesis Upside Down

One of the important elements in Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities is the claim that our *ideas* of primary qualities resemble properties in the objects whereas our ideas of secondary qualities do not: "That the *Ideas of primary Qualities* of Bodies, are *Resemblances* of them, and their Patterns do really exist in the Bodies themselves; but the *Ideas, produced* in us *by these Secondary Qualities, have no resemblance* of them at all" (1975, II. 8. §15). As I discussed in Chapter 2, some have taken the distinction between primary and secondary qualities as one between objective and subjective properties. The claim I made in the past section was, however, that objective properties could not possibly be perfect resemblances of the way they are phenomenologically presented to us. Am I making the claim that Locke had it all turned upside down when he said that primary qualities resembled our ideas of them and secondary qualities did not?

A key issue is what Locke means with *ideas* and *resemblance*. The only way to make my claim opposite to Locke's resemblance theory is if we take his *ideas* to refer to phenomenal content. I am no Locke scholar, but from what I gather this would not be considered a very plausible interpretation of his *ideas*. Hence, I do not consider my claim to be an upside-down version of Locke's resemblance theory. However, it can be considered an upside-down version of *some* resemblance theory. My upside-down resemblance theory goes like this: An objective property cannot bear a perfect resemblance to the phenomenal content of an experience of it. A subjective property can bear a perfect resemblance to the phenomenal content of an experience of it.

This upside-down resemblance thesis of mine can obviously only apply to properties experiences of which have phenomenal content. Locke's

resemblance thesis has sometimes been interpreted as an error theory about secondary qualities.<sup>41</sup> The way that interpretation goes is roughly that Locke's *ideas* are concepts, and that in the case of secondary qualities the objects have no properties that correspond to our secondary quality concepts. Does my upside down resemblance thesis entail an error theory about objective properties?

I think not. As I explained above, I doubt that we really believe *Revelation* about colors (whether they are subjective or objective properties, which I have not established yet). And I do not think we believe *Revelation* in general about properties that can be considered objective.

#### **5.2.4. Color Concepts and Color Properties**

While neither color primitivism nor an error theory of color is a viable option, both views express something important about our color concepts. Both views involve the idea that we generally believe *Revelation* about colors. While I doubt that we really do, that we really believe that colors are mind-independent properties that are perfect resemblances of our color sensations, I think we do believe that our color sensations show us something important about colors. That is, even though we do not strictly believe that the colors are exactly *like* our sensations of them, we do think we can make all sorts of judgments about them purely on the basis of those sensations.<sup>42</sup> One example is relations of similarity and difference between the colors: We take it for

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Mackie 1976 and Alexander 1977.

<sup>42</sup> My view here is similar to that of Johnston's mentioned above.

granted that orange is more similar to red than it is to blue simply because our sensation of orange is more similar to that of red than to that of blue. Another example is the belief that colors are visible; that we can tell by sight, at least most of the time under most conditions, which colors objects have. That is, we believe that our sensations of blue give us, at least usually, the information that the object at which we are looking is blue.

What matters here is that we do not have to believe *Revelation* about color in order to believe that there is an extent to which our sensations of color tell us exactly what the colors are and what they are like. We can believe that our color sensations reveal to us everything about the colors that matters to us for our most of our everyday purposes. According to that belief, our color sensations reveal to us which colors are similar and which are different, which colors “go well” together and which do not, that when we mix blue paint with yellow we get green paint, etc., and for those practical, mundane purposes it may be sufficient for me to point to something blue and say “look at that” in order to explain what it is for something to be blue. But this does not mean that we really believe that our color sensations actually reveal all there is to know about the nature of color. It no more does that than the claim of an experienced author that she knows all about book writing commits her to the claim that she knows everything there is to know about all the things involved, such as the writer’s brain processes or the hardware of the computer used to write the books. Even though we may believe that color sensations reveal everything that matters about the colors in a certain context, it does not commit us to such a belief in all contexts, or the belief that colors are nothing above and beyond what color sensations reveal to us. And it does not commit

us to the belief that colors actually are properties that perfectly resemble our color sensations.

The fact that there is a context in which we believe that our color sensations reveal everything, or at least everything that matters, about the colors suggests that our color sensations play an important role in our color concepts. They are response-dependent. This means that it is essential to our concept of blueness that it be of a property responsible for our sensations of blue. A property that is not behind those phenomenological experiences of ours has to be something other than blueness (this is similar to what Johnston and others have said about core beliefs about colors). While our color concepts are not of properties exactly like our color sensations, they are concepts of properties strongly tied to that phenomenal content. Hence, the subjectivity of our experiences is relevant when it comes to defining color properties.

As I have been speaking of concepts of properties, let me stipulate this before going further: The colors are the properties to which our color concepts refer. If it so turns out that there are no properties corresponding to our color concepts, that means that our color concepts are misplaced or fail to refer to anything real. For a property to be the property of blueness, it must correspond well enough to our concept of blueness to be its proper referent. It does not have to be exactly like our current concept of blueness—we could be wrong about a thing or two—but presumably it must resemble it to a considerable degree. For this reason, I think we can say a great deal about properties such as colors on the basis of our concepts of them.

Now, having established this much about our color concepts, what can we conclude about whether color properties are subjective or objective with



respect to their instantiation? What does this tell us about whether they are instantiated independently of our experiences of them?

We seem to have some good reasons to think of colors as objective in this sense. According to color objectivism, objects have their colors independently of our color experiences. The colors are identified as the physical properties of the objects that cause us to perceive them as colored. It is not a matter of our thoughts or perceptions whether and when such a property is instantiated in an object. This seems consistent with many things we believe about colors. Suppose I color a piece of paper green, then put it in my desk drawer and forget all about it. Then there is nobody who thinks this piece of paper in my desk drawer is green. However, it makes sense to say that the piece of paper is still green. A flower growing wild that nobody has ever seen or shed any kind of thought can still be blue. Someone might wonder on what basis that flower is blue and providing the answer to that has been somewhat difficult for the color objectivists. The answer that the flower is blue on the basis of its microphysical properties is dubious in light of the multiple realization of color and color metamerism. There is no one microphysical property (or even two or three...or two hundred) that the things we call blue have in common.

The unwanted result if we insist that colors are microphysical properties is that we cannot tell one color from another by vision alone. In response to this problem, some have suggested that colors are spectral reflectance profiles. There already, we have a subjective element, as the sorting into spectral reflectance profiles will be based on human color vision. If our color vision were different, those profiles would be differently compiled. But even though there is a subjective element involved in fixing the reference of color

terms, the instantiation of colors is not thereby mind-dependent. The objectivists can still say that once a spectral reflectance profile has been defined, it is an objective matter whether an object falls under it or not. So there are some good reasons to say that colors are objective properties.

But there are also some good reasons for calling the colors subjective. One is that in some cases it seems to be a matter of opinion what color an object has. People disagree, for instance, about where exactly to put “true blue” or “true red” on the spectrum. When asked to pick out a color chip that shows the true blue color, one person may select a chip that another considers slightly green or slightly purple. This seems to be due to variation in human color vision. While there are those who claim that this means that only some humans have correct color vision and thus correctly select the objectively true blue chip<sup>43</sup>, others take this to show that there is no such thing as true blue *simpliciter*<sup>44</sup>. This seems to suggest that at least in some cases, it is our perception—not which microphysical properties the object has—that determines whether a certain color is instantiated.

Neither the claim that colors are objective nor the claim that colors are subjective seems to be a particularly good fit. Let us consider the notion of faultless disagreement, or the appearance of faultless disagreement, from chapter 4, and use that as a test for the subjectivity of colors. On the account I gave there, a property is subjectively instantiated if two people can disagree about its instantiation, or at least appear to disagree about it, yet both be right. Is this true of colors? The answer seems to be that sometimes it is and

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<sup>43</sup> This is argued by Michael Tye (2006). Tye claims that while we have no way of knowing which of us are the lucky right perceivers of true blue, the fact of the matter is that some of us are.

<sup>44</sup> For an example of this, see Cohen, Hardin & McLaughlin (2007).

sometimes it is not. If Jack and Jill are looking at a color chip and Jack says it is truly blue while Jill says it is slightly greenish (and thus not truly blue), it makes sense to say that neither of them is wrong. On the other hand, if Jack says that the chip is blue and Jill says that it is red, at least one of them must be wrong. What does this suggest? Are colors subjective or are they objective?

### **5.2.5. Colors are Subjective and Objective**

Determining whether colors are subjective or objective is no easy matter. One thing we may consider is whether the reason is simply that color terms are vague. That would make it possible for colors to be objective; the only issue would be that the boundaries between where one color category ends and another begins were vague. I believe color terms *are* vague, but not that it solves the issue of true colors. A painted wall that one person considers reddish orange may be considered yellowish red by another. Their disagreement is terminological; it is not over the color itself but over what to call it. But this is not the case when one person perceives a color chip as truly blue while another perceives it as greenish blue. That is a case of differences in perception of the color itself. The two people have different sensations when they look at the color chip; their sensory responses to it differ. This is analogous with the question of whether Grover is funny. Emma has the response of being amused and Harriet does not and these different responses cause them to form different judgments about whether Grover is funny. They

can still be in perfect agreement about how to define funniness; something they would not be if this had to do with the vagueness of the term in question.

One possible approach when it comes to addressing the relativity of color is to claim that color terms have multiple meanings. On such an account, the term 'blue' has (at least) two possible referents, and it depends on the context which one is at play<sup>45</sup>. One referent is some kind of appearance property; the color the object in question looks to have, blue-as-we-see-it. Another referent is an intrinsic property of the object, a spectral reflectance profile or even a specific microphysical property. So the term 'blue' does not refer to just one property but to several properties of different types. This approach solves some problems. One is this: When I look at an object that I judge to be uniformly colored, say, an orange, there is also a sense in which it does not appear to have just one color. If I focus my attention to the way the surface of the orange reflects light, parts of the surface may look white or yellow, for instance. So in one sense the orange looks to me as having various colors while in another sense it looks to me as being simply orange.

Another problem that a multiple referent theory of color can solve is the fact that people seem to disagree when it comes to their intuitions about imagined cases of radical changes in our color vision. Suppose that humans become afflicted with a highly contagious virus that causes permanent changes in their visual system<sup>46</sup>. Over the course of a few weeks, every single human gets infected. The virus causes a spectrum inversion; grass now looks to us to have the color that ripe tomatoes looked to have before the plague. Is

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<sup>45</sup> An account along these lines can be found in Brown (2006), Maund (1995), and Rosenthal (1999).

<sup>46</sup> We can suppose that the virus causes genetic changes as well so that future generations of humans will be born with the same kind of visual system as their ancestors who got the virus.

grass still green after this change or has it become red even though its intrinsic properties have not changed? Answers to this question, apparently based on intuition, seem to vary<sup>47</sup>. However, on a multiple referent theory of color terms, it can simply be said that those who answer 'yes' have one referent of 'green' in mind whereas those who answer 'no' have another referent in mind. In the first case, the referent of the term 'green' is fixed by actual human experiences of green as they are now, whereas in the second, the referent of 'green' is not fixed in this way.

But does a multiple referent theory solve the matter entirely? Let us compare the case of Jack and Jill looking at a color chip and disagreeing about whether it is truly blue or greenish blue with the case of their disagreeing about whether the chip is blue or red. In the first case we will most likely want to say that both of them are right. From the point of view of a multiple referent theory, it must be because we think that Jack and Jill are speaking of the way the chip appears to them so the chip can have different appearance colors while it of course only has one set of spectral reflectances. But if so, why can we not say the same thing when Jack says the chip is blue and Jill says it is red? If the chip looks blue to Jack and looks red to Jill,<sup>48</sup> why is there a problem if there is none when the chip looks truly blue to Jack and greenish blue to Jill? Why do we say that either Jack or Jill (or possibly both of them) must be misperceiving the color chip if one of them sees it as red while the

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<sup>47</sup> See Simon Blackburn (1985) for someone whose intuition seems to be that the color of grass would have changed: "if we were to change so that everything in the world which had appeared blue came to appear red to us, this is what it is for the world to cease to contain blue things, and come to contain only red things" (p. 14). Sydney Shoemaker's (1994) intuition is quite the opposite: "...I don't think that if overnight massive surgery produces intrasubjective spectrum inversion in everyone, grass will have become red and daffodils will have become blue" (p. 32).

<sup>48</sup> Let us suppose that neither Jack nor Jill is wearing tinted glasses, looking through a colored sheet or anything of the kind. Furthermore, neither of them is hesitant about their judgment; each of them states with conviction that the chip is blue/red.

other sees it as blue, but not if one of them sees it as truly blue while the other sees it as greenish blue?

The answer to the above question is this: Because the judgments Jack and Jill are making are dependent on intrinsic features of the color chip. There is a certain range of intrinsic properties that allows for their bearers to be somewhere in the blue range (or a part of that range). On the other hand, there is no range of intrinsic properties that makes it possible for one and the same thing to be blue or red, depending on the perceiver's experiences. A certain set or range of intrinsic properties is the set of acceptable candidates for true blue. None of them is also a member of the set of acceptable candidates for red.

Similar things can be said about some properties that tend to be considered subjective, such as funniness. When Emma says that Grover is funny and Harriet says that he is not, we accept both judgments as valid because the properties Grover has independently of Emma and Harriet's judgments are such as to make him an acceptable candidate for funniness. But suppose Emma says that losing a loved one is funny and Harriet says it is not. These are not two equally valid judgments; Emma is plainly wrong. Losing a loved one is not an acceptable candidate for funniness. If Emma experiences amusement at losing a loved one, there is something wrong with her psychological makeup.

An account of multiple referents does not seem to be the best way to deal with this, whether for colors, funniness, or any of the other properties I am sure we can all think of for which something similar holds. If we suppose that the referents of color terms are fixed, we cannot explain how both Jack and Jill can be right when one of them says the chip is truly blue and the other says it

is greenish blue. If we suppose that the referents of color terms are not fixed, we cannot explain why there is a problem when Jack and Jill disagree over whether the chip is red or blue. To solve this, I propose that we think of the properties in question as both subjective and objective. Let me explain how:

The color chip at which Jack and Jill are looking has various intrinsic features. Among them are features that put it in the blue color range and make it an acceptable candidate for true blue. The fact that these features are in place is mind-independent. It is not up to the thoughts or judgments of Jack or Jill, you or me that the chip has these features. However, it is mind-dependent whether these features make it so that the chip is truly blue or greenish blue. We might say that this is because the facts about that are perceiver-relative or we might say it is because a property such as true blue *simpliciter* cannot be instantiated; only true-blue-to-Jack, true-blue-to-Jill, etc. Either way, this makes the instantiation subjective, as I argued in chapter 3. But the instantiation of true blue is also objective to a considerable degree as the fact that the chip's intrinsic features place it in the range of acceptable candidates for true blue is mind-independent.

A similar case can be made for a property such as funniness. While it is a matter of opinion to a large degree whether funniness is instantiated, we still differentiate between things that are potentially funny and things that are not. Losing a loved one, torture, and mass murder do not have mind-independent features that place them in the potentially funny category. Grover, slipping on banana peel, and Margaret Cho do.

According to this account, there can be an objectivity/subjectivity spectrum for properties. At one end, there are properties that are entirely objective, i.e. their instantiation is purely objective, and at the other end we

have properties that are entirely subjective. Properties that have a wide range of features for their acceptable candidates fall near the subjective end of the spectrum while those with a narrow range fall near the objective end of the spectrum. Consider a property such as being 75.3 cm long. There is only one way to fulfill the instantiation of that property, i.e. the set of acceptable candidates has only one member. The perceiver of the object has no say when it comes to voting between hopeful candidates; there is only one who qualifies. This makes the instantiation of being 75.3 cm long entirely objective. True blue has a fairly narrow range of acceptable candidates. The subject has some say in which color chip is the one that is truly blue, but the restrictions determined independently of the perceiver are reasonably fixed. The range of acceptable candidates for funny things is wider; the subject has more choices than in the true blue case, and thus funniness gets a spot on the spectrum closer to the subjective end than blueness gets<sup>49</sup>.

This account does not exclude the possibility of color terms having multiple referents. That may very well be the case, and perhaps that is the best explanation of some apparent problems that arise when we speak of color. But multiple reference is not sufficient as a solution to all color issues. If we want an explanation of why disagreement about true blue vs. greenish blue is acceptable whereas disagreement about blue vs. red is not, thinking of colors as both subjectively and objectively determined is better<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> It is not clear to me whether restrictions on funniness can go the other way as well, that is, whether there are things whose intrinsic features are such that someone who fails to find anything amusing about them must have an impaired sense of humor. If so, then those things are not in the range of "potentially not-funny" candidates. Subjects then still have some freedom in judging their degrees of funniness, such as whether the thing in question is hilarious or just rather funny.

<sup>50</sup> It is possible that some might object to this idea of being both subjectively and objectively instantiated and prefer to speak of restricted subjectivity instead. I am not certain whether such an objection would mainly be terminological or run deeper than that.



### 5.3. Sensory Properties

Recent decades have given us a vast literature about the status of color with various intricacies to ponder. But what about color's siblings in the sensory family? While Locke and Berkeley and some of their contemporaries seemed almost as interested in smell and sound as they were in color, very little has been added to the philosophical literature about such properties, at least in the context under consideration, by our contemporaries. Of the sensory properties, philosophers have mainly been concerned with color. Philosophical accounts of other sensory properties are few and far between.

Perhaps there is some good answer to why philosophers nowadays seem to find color so much more interesting than any other sensory property. Is it easier to use color as an example or somehow more salient? Or is it the other way around; is color more difficult to grasp than the other sensory properties, and thereby a more interesting and worthwhile research topic?

At any rate, we have a reason to wonder whether color can rightfully be used as a paradigm sensory property. I have now given an account claiming that we have good reasons to consider the instantiation of color as both objective and subjective. Can those results be considered representative of all the sensory properties or must we deal with each property separately? Can we then assume that something analogous to the color account holds for each of the other sensory properties?

I believe that while we cannot extrapolate everything there is to be said about color to claims about other sensory properties, what differences there are between colors and other sensory properties do not affect the issue of where to put the properties on the subjective/objective spectrum. That is, that what makes it so that colors are both subjective and objective also holds for

other sensory properties. I will argue that looking at recent scientific research on how the different sense modalities work together supports my view that the properties we perceive with our senses should be considered together. While much of the literature on color has certainly been inspiring and illuminating in various ways, focusing on color alone by itself can be limiting.

First, let us consider what it is that makes a property sensory. By *sensory property* I mean a property that we perceive with one of our five senses, and associate with a certain sense modality. Our concept of it is to some degree based on the sensation we have when we perceive it. Colors are in this sense undoubtedly sensory properties, and so are odors, flavors, and sounds. It seems somewhat more difficult to specify which property it is that we perceive and associate with our sense of touch. Some have said it is heat. In addition to this list, there is another list of possible candidates. Some would argue that while proper shape properties are not sensory properties because we do not base our concepts of them on a sensation or tie them to a specific sense modality, there can be properties such as “squareness-as-seen” or “squareness-as-felt” that are sensory. In my discussion of sensory properties here, I will stick to the original list. However, issues such as seen shapes versus felt shapes will become relevant in my discussion of the different sense modalities.

Secondly, let us consider what it is that gives color, on my account, the status of being partly subjective and partly objective. What seems important is that our color concepts are response-dependent; our sensations of color are of high importance when it comes to determining what colors are. Whatever properties the colors really are, they must be the properties that correspond to those sensations of ours. And given that some variation between people

regarding which properties cause which sensations is considered normal, we want the perceiving subjects to have some power of decision when it comes the question of instantiation. What also seems important is that by looking at the colors of things we learn about the world around us. Perceiving colors is a means of access to the external world; to finding out about things that are not just figments of our imagination. So we do want and expect the “way the world is” to determine what colors things have.

What I just said about colors seems to hold for other sensory properties as well. Touching, smelling, tasting, and listening are all methods we use to find out about the way the world is. The sensations associated with them are also vital and we want the perceiving subjects to have a say when it comes to determining when the corresponding properties are instantiated. We expect some variation to be possible without the assumption that someone must be wrong as a result. So we have some good reasons to hold that these properties are, just like colors, instantiated somewhat subjectively and somewhat objectively. But before reaching a final verdict, we should examine what evidence there is to the contrary.

### **5.3.1. Why Should there Be a Difference?**

**Shoemaker’s intuition.** In his paper “Phenomenal Character” (Shoemaker 1994), Sydney Shoemaker compares bitterness with color and claims that colors are more objective than flavors:

Consider Jonathan Bennett’s example of phenol-thio-uria, which tastes bitter to three-quarters of the population and is tasteless to the rest [...] If as the result of selective breeding, or surgical

tampering, it becomes tasteless to everyone, I say it has become tasteless. And if more drastic surgical tampering makes it taste sweet to everyone, I say it has become sweet. But I don't think that if overnight massive surgery produces intrasubjective spectrum inversion in everyone, grass will have become red and daffodils will have become blue (p. 32).

The reason for this difference, according to Shoemaker, is that the semantics of color terms and flavor terms differ and that our color concepts are more objective than our flavor concepts. The idea seems to be that the reference of color terms is fixed by our actual color experiences whereas the reference of flavor terms is not. The semantics of flavor concepts is more strongly tied to their associated sensations than that of color concepts is (fn. 6, p. 37).

I think this is an example that shows how a dual referent theory can be useful. Surely, we can say for each of the imagined cases that on one understanding of the term, the properties will have changed, and that on another understanding of it, they will not have changed<sup>51</sup>. There is a way to use 'bitter' that makes it so that phenol-thio-uria will still be bitter, and there is also a way to use 'bitter' that makes it so that phenol-thio-uria will no longer be bitter. Ditto for the color case. When and whether one understanding of the term is more valid than the other can be difficult to tell and there may be occasions on which we are uncertain about which one is at play. Shoemaker's intuition about the difference may suggest that we use the fixed versions of color terms more often than we do for flavor terms, but I very much doubt that we *always* use them in the case of color and *never* in the case of flavor.

Both these notions of flavor, the one where the referents of the terms are fixed and the one where they are not, have room for my mixed

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<sup>51</sup> I am using my loose notion of 'property' here, which is considerably broader than Shoemaker's.

subjective/objective account of instantiation. Assume the non-fixed notion, so that phenol-thio-uria would be tasting sweet after the surgical tampering. We might still say that someone who claimed it tasted salty had to be misperceiving. Even though changes in the subjects as a group would result in changes in the instantiation of the property, the intrinsic features of phenol-thio-uria are still relevant to determining which flavor properties are instantiated in it. Assume the fixed version of flavor terms and we get the same results as with a fixed version of color terms.

**Differences between sense modalities.** Various accounts have been given according to which our sense modalities work in fundamentally different ways. Frequently, such accounts involve the idea that perception via some sense modalities is spatial, or yields conceptual material we can use for forming spatial concepts, while perception via other modalities is non-spatial. Now, how would this affect the properties perceived by the sense modalities? This is how: Let us consider the Kantian claim that a conception of space is an essential element in our conception of mind-independence; of unperceived existence. Suppose this claim is true<sup>52</sup>. Then it is the case that the concept of an objective property, a property that can be instantiated independently of what we think or perceive, involves a spatial element. We must be able to make sense of the idea of the property being instantiated in an object that is located such that we cannot or do not perceive it. I.e. we conceive of the object as having another location than we do ourselves. The concept of a sensory property is strongly tied to the associated sense modality. As I have

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<sup>52</sup> I myself find this claim fairly plausible. Arguments for it can be found in Strawson 1959 and Evans 1980.

argued above, such a concept is response-dependent and thus fixed to a certain sensory response associated with the appropriate modality. If the sense modality in question is non-spatial, it is unclear how the concept of a corresponding property could be spatial. Thereby, the concept—and thus the property—is missing an element essential to its objectivity. The conclusion is that properties perceived via non-spatial sense-modalities must be exclusively subjective<sup>53</sup>.

If the argument I have just outlined is sound, properties perceived via non-spatial sense modalities cannot be objective. It is only via the spatial modalities that we can perceive properties that are objective, or to some extent objective. This suggests that we cannot infer from an account of color, a property perceived by vision, to properties perceived by other sense modalities. However, I do not think the argument is sound. Its weakness lies in one of its two main premises; that there are fundamental differences between the sense modalities that make some of them spatial and some non-spatial. Let us examine some of the things that have been said in its favor.

In *Individuals* (Strawson 1959), P.F. Strawson claims that hearing is a non-spatial modality, whereas touch and vision are spatial. He creates an example of a purely auditory being, and argues that this being cannot possibly possess spatial concepts, the reason being that sounds are essentially non-spatial:

[Sounds] have no intrinsic spatial characteristics.... The fact that, with the variegated types of sense-experiences which we in fact have, we can, as we say, 'on the strength of hearing alone' assign directions and distances to sounds, and things that emit or cause them...is sufficiently explained by the existence of correlations between the variations of which sound

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<sup>53</sup> This argument is not without flaws. However, I hope the reader will accept that this could be argued, perhaps more convincingly than in the outline I provide here.

is intrinsically capable and other non-auditory features of our sense experience (p. 169).

Evaluating the plausibility of Strawson's proposal is difficult, especially because of difficulties imagining a purely auditory experience. A being who is blind, cannot smell or taste, unable to move and has no sense of touch—this is a being who presumably cannot even feel her own body. Can trying to imagine the experiences of such a being really tell us much about what our actual auditory concepts are like? I think not, and shortly I will explain why. But first I will consider some other claims about differences between sense modalities.

An account of sound considerably different from Strawson's is proposed by Robert Pasnau (1999). Pasnau claims that hearing is like vision, and unlike the senses of touch and olfaction, in being a locational modality. Locational modalities, according to Pasnau, are those that "directly yield information not just about sensory qualities, but about the location of those qualities"<sup>54</sup> (Pasnau 1999, p. 313). On the other hand, says Pasnau; smell, taste, and touch are non-locational. He makes the claim that we do not perceive smell as being located anywhere in particular and a similar claim about heat: that we do not perceive heat as existing in the hot or heat-emitting object, but in the medium:

...we do not perceive the heat to exist at its source. Accordingly, it is reasonable to think of heat, like odour, as existing in the object and in the medium. Again there is a fundamental difference between sight and hearing (the locational modalities) and smell, taste and touch. Only sight and hearing perceive things as being out in the world, at a distance from the body (p. 314).

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<sup>54</sup> I think we can safely assume here that Pasnau is referring to *instances* of the qualities being located somewhere. In the following discussion, this will be the implied use.

The difference between locational and non-locational sense modalities is, according to Pasnau, a fundamental one (Ibid.). Seeing and hearing yield information about the location of the properties seen or heard. Smelling, touching, and tasting do not yield such information, says Pasnau; we do not perceive odor, heat and flavor as being anywhere in particular.

If Pasnau is right, his view might lend support to an argument for the claim that colors and sounds have an objective element but other sensory properties not. Pasnau himself does not make any such claim, but as discussed above, an argument of this kind is based on the premise that differences between sense modalities make some of them spatial and some non-spatial. Being locational can be seen as a form of being spatial, therefore Pasnau's locational modalities could fulfill the role of the spatial modalities while the non-locational modalities would be the non-spatial ones. What is interesting if we contrast Pasnau's view with Strawson's is, of course, that according to Strawson hearing is non-spatial while on Pasnau's account it is locational.

I find Pasnau's account unconvincing from an empirical point of view. For instance, Pasnau makes the following claim: "Even though we can sometimes make inferences about where the heat is coming from, based on which part of our body feels the heat most intensely, we do not perceive the heat to exist at its source" (p. 314). I cannot speak for others, but this most certainly counters my experiences of heat. Let us imagine that I enter a kitchen, in which there is a transistor radio on the counter next to the stove. One of the burner plates on the stove is turned on and so is the radio. By touching the hot burner plate, I will perceive heat as being in the burner; the burner will feel hot to me. Similarly, I will hear music coming from the radio and perceive it as being in



the radio. Why Pasnau thinks there is some fundamental difference, locationally speaking, about the two perceptions eludes me.

As support for his claims, Pasnau offers the example of the game HOT/COLD in which one searches for an object with the aid of clues in the form of HOT and COLD (HOT means one is close to the object and COLD that one is far from it). About this, Pasnau says:

This process is entirely inferential, in that one never directly senses that the object must be in one direction or another. The game faithfully mirrors our perception of temperature, and also the way we perceive odours. In contrast, hunting for a cricket in one's home by its sound is not like playing the game HOT/COLD. In hunting for the cricket one tries to discern where the sounds are located, and then one moves in that direction. One does not move randomly; one does not zero in on the target by listening to whether the noises get louder or softer as one moves around...The task is not inferential, but a matter of attempting to hear the sound accurately. (p. 314)

Again, Pasnau's description is not consistent with my behavior or experiences. Has he never been bothered by a faint, annoying sound which he has had trouble locating? Has he never moved around randomly in order to find out if the high-frequency sound that is driving him nuts is coming from inside his house, from outside or inside his own ears? And how can he claim that the game HOT/COLD is exactly like our *actual* experiences of heat and odor? If the heat or odor is strong enough, I do not find myself moving around randomly to locate them. I will perceive the heat or odor as coming from a certain direction, just as I do in the case of a sufficiently clear and distinct sound.

Another problem with Pasnau's account is that he seems to take it for granted that perception of heat is what the sense of touch is all about. While it is true that touch is how we perceive heat and cold, we can also perceive

other qualities via that modality. Smoothness and roughness come to mind. And it seems utterly impossible for the smoothness of a glass pane to be perceived as anywhere but *in* the pane. This does not have to mean that smoothness and roughness are sensory properties. What matters is that they can be perceived via touch, since the issue here is the nature of the modality and not the properties associated with it.

### **5.3.2. Crossmodality and Molyneux's Question**

Recent research in neuropsychology indicates that we are better at locating things and at determining their shapes when more than one sense modality is involved. For instance, sound location becomes more acute when tactual cues are provided (Menning et al., 2005; Kitagawa et al., 2005). More generally, there seems to be vast evidence available for crossmodal integration, i.e. that our senses work better when they work together (Amedi et al. 2005; Kirchner & Colonius 2005), and that there are structural reasons for this in the neural system (Macaluso & Driver, 2005; Meredith, 2002). Research on brains of humans and other primates suggests that the neocortex is to a great extent multisensory (Ghazanfar and Schroeder 2006). This suggests that sensory integration takes place early in the perceptual process and thus that our experiences of the world are never unisensory but always to some extent crossmodal. The world is then not presented to us through one modality at a time, but through several of them jointly.

These findings from neuropsychology make any radical representational differences between our sense modalities seem implausible. It simply does not

seem to be the case that we perceive the world piece by piece through the respective modalities and then put the pieces together. Instead, the evidence suggests that our perception of the world is a process that relies on a joint effort by the different senses. Of course there are differences between the sense modalities, as is evident to us all. We do not get seeing something mixed up with hearing it, for instance, and there is something unique that we associate with each modality and the sensations it produces. But the information we acquire does not seem to differ fundamentally from one sense to the other; this is where the senses work together.<sup>55</sup>

This issue is strongly related to issues concerning the so-called Molyneux's question. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Locke 1975), Locke describes a question posed to him by William Molyneux:

Suppose a Man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a Cube and a Sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and t'other, which is the Cube, which the Sphere. Suppose then the Cube and the Sphere placed on a Table, and the Blind Man to be made to see: Quaere, Whether by his sight, before he touch'd them, he could now distinguish, and tell, which is the Globe, which the Cube? (Locke 1975, II, ix, 8, p. 146).

Molyneux's question has been interpreted in many different ways. There are several perspectives from which it can be addressed. Among other things, Molyneux's question can be one about whether we perceive the same property when we see an object of a certain shape and when we *touch* it. Are seen cubeness and touched cubeness the same property? Another interpretation is this: assuming we do perceive the same shape property via

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<sup>55</sup> For an account of the senses as different modes of awareness of the same environment, see Noë 2002.

vision and touch, do these two modalities provide us with one and the same concept of it or with two different concepts?<sup>56</sup>

The empirical evidence provided by the neuropsychological research suggests that the spatial concepts are crossmodal, i.e. that the spatial concepts are the same whether we see the shapes or feel them. If crossmodality plays such a strong role in our perceptual experiences as the research indicates, and the sense modalities support each other, the likelihood of there being different spatial concepts associated with each modality gets small<sup>57</sup>. Hence, it is very likely that the answer to Molyneux's question interpreted as one about whether the concepts are the same will be "yes".

Let us now return to the issue under consideration. The idea was that if some sense modalities are non-spatial, that could be used to argue that the properties perceived by them are non-spatial and thus missing an objective basis. There is no reason to think that any of our sense modalities are non-spatial. Obviously, we do not smell or taste shapes (or hear them, for that matter), but our senses of smell and flavor do give us information about location. We taste things as being inside our mouth or at least as touching our tongue. And although our sense of smell is not as acute as that of a dog, we can use it to locate things. Furthermore, there are good reasons to think that our spatial concepts are crossmodal or not tied to any particular modality.

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<sup>56</sup> The importance of making a distinction between the two different issues involved in these two interpretations of the question is stressed by Hopkins 2005. MacDonald (2004) argues that the important issue involved is whether there are two kinds of spatial concepts associated with the modalities.

<sup>57</sup> Research used specifically to address Molyneux's question is cited by Meltzoff (1993) and MacDonald (2004). The evidence is all in the favor of crossmodality of the concepts.

## 5.4. Conclusion

I have just argued that we do not have a reason to differentiate between our sense modalities when it comes to experiencing things in space or as having a location. Hence, if we were to consider, say, colors and sounds as something we perceive as having a location while odors, flavors and heat were perceived as being nowhere in particular (or even in ourselves), it would have to be on some other basis than an alleged difference between modalities. I do not believe there is such a basis.

What all sensory properties have in common is that the phenomenal content of our experiences of them plays a role in their definition. They are all properties we perceive objects around us as having, and that we think they have, at least some of the time and/or in some cases, independently of our perceptions of them. The exact circumstances of when and whether to think of the property as mind-dependent or mind-independent may vary to some degree from one property to another. But what all sensory properties share is sufficient to put them in the same category on the subjectivity/objectivity spectrum.

## CHAPTER 6

### AFTERTHOUGHTS

My primary concern has been to defend a distinction between subjective and objective properties based on how they are instantiated. Objective properties are instantiated independently of what we in a broad sense think. Subjective properties are instantiated on the basis of what we think, i.e. because we think they are or at least because we are having a corresponding subjective response.

In Chapter 2 I claimed that distinguishing between subjective and objective properties on the basis of how we conceive of them is not sufficient for my purposes. Yet in another sense, how we conceive of the properties plays a crucial role. Let me clarify:

Our concept  $c$  of a property  $p$  is our primary means of access to it when it comes to discussing or speculating about its nature. If I want to describe what  $p$  is like, I inevitably rely on  $c$  as my source of information. It follows that if I am considering the mind-dependence of  $p$ , I must consider whether  $c$  is a concept of a mind-dependent property.  $C$  is guaranteed to be a reliable source about  $p$  because we fix its reference as whichever property corresponds to  $c$ . It could be the case that  $p$  is never instantiated and that we are thus mistaken when we think that this or that object has it. But as long as our understanding of  $c$  is adequate, we cannot be in error about what  $p$  is like. So of course  $c$  is important when it comes to determining whether  $p$  is objective or subjective.

However, this does not make the distinction between the two kinds of properties rest on a distinction between two kinds of concepts. We can of course come up with a distinction between concepts in this respect; in one

group we put concepts of subjectively instantiated properties and in the other group we put concepts of objectively instantiated properties. But note that this is a distinction not based on how the concepts are constructed, or on how they come to be, or on how we come to possess them. What makes the two kinds of concepts different is that they are of different kinds of properties. The basis of the distinction does not lie in the concepts, but in the properties of which they are concepts.

This is important to keep in mind when the issue of response-dependence comes up. What is it that is supposed to be response-dependent, concepts or properties, and in what is dependence meant to consist? This can get confusing. For instance, Johnston's notion of response-dependent concepts is, after all, in a certain sense property-based rather than concept-based. Even though he speaks of *concepts*, what makes these concepts response-dependent has to do with the properties of which they are concepts. A response-dependent or response-dispositional concept, for Johnston, is a concept of a disposition to produce a subjective response. So while we in one sense need to look at the concept in order to evaluate the nature of this property, the disposition in question, we do not get any closer to the property's nature by considering the concept *qua* concept. It is the concept's content that becomes the focus: the property.

By considering how the instantiation of a property can be dependent on the occurrence of a subjective response, we do get subjective properties in the sense in which I am interested. If a property  $p$  is instantiated only if subjective response  $R$  occurs, then the instantiation of  $p$  is dependent on the occurrence of  $R$ . And then the instantiation is mind-dependent in the sense that it takes place because of the mental activities of a subject.

This very idea, that some properties are instantiated if and only if a subject thinks they are, has its problems. On the one hand, we can allow for the possibility of subjects disagreeing about the instantiation of such a property. And what happens then? If subject *A* thinks that *p* is instantiated and subject *B* thinks it is not, then is *p* instantiated or not? If we want to say that both *A* and *B* can be right, then how do we account for that? If we assume that only one of *A* and *B* can be right, there does not seem to be anything mind-dependent about the instantiation of the property. As I have argued in Chapter 4, I believe there are ways to make the judgments and/or responses of *A* and *B* equally good, which retain the mind-dependence of the instantiation of a certain set of properties.

Someone might be tempted to hold that this set of subjectively instantiated properties should include all properties. Since our concepts of the properties are our only available resource when it comes to speculating about them, and our perceptions of the world are all we have when it comes to determining which properties are instantiated, then why not just assume that it is all up to us and our judgments and perceptions? In Chapter 4 I argued that most subjectivist theories about what properties there are in the world have room for mind-independent instantiation of some of these properties. The most extreme forms of subjectivism, however, do not allow for objectively instantiated properties. I do not address such views in any way. Let it suffice to say that I think they come with their own set of serious problems and that if my readers feel drawn to them, they must accept them at their own risk. I work under the assumption that at least some of the world's features, however basic, are independent of what we think of them.



Perhaps it is my belief in those basic features that makes me reluctant to consider any properties entirely subjectively instantiated. Even when property  $p$  is instantiated in an object because of my judgment that it is so, then there are some features of the object on which I base my judgment. Of course it does not have to be the case that my judgment is entirely because of these particular features; I might have formed the same judgment even though the object had somewhat different features. But it cannot be the case that I would have formed the same judgment regardless of what features the object had. There is a limited set of features on the basis of which I would judge the object to have  $p$ . If the object's features fall outside this set and I still judge it as being  $p$ , then I am wrong. Perhaps my understanding of what it means for something to be  $p$  is lacking or perhaps there is something wrong with my perceptual system or my ability to form value judgments. But whatever the reason is, my judgment is flawed.

Sensory properties are a clear example of properties straddling the two realms; the objective and the subjective. We use our perceptual system to gain information about the way the world is around us. In fact, it is the mind's only means of access to the material world. If we are to believe in our ability to learn about the external world at all, we must assume that our senses provide us with mind-independent information. But the sensory properties are also strongly associated with their respective sense modalities. There *are* good reasons to think that a lollipop's being green and sour has *something* to do with it looking green and tasting sour to us, at least in some sense or to some extent.

It is this fine balance between our being presented with the world and our molding the world that I find so intriguing.

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