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PHILIP PETTIT

Terms, Things and Response-Dependence

The word 'response-dependent' was introduced by Mark Johnston (1989) to pick out those terms and concepts that are biconditionally connected, as an *a priori* matter, with certain more or less primitive responses: in particular, with responses of a perceptual or affective character. Colour terms provide the least contentious examples, for it is agreed on many sides that something is red, as an *a priori* matter, just in case it is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal circumstances. While there are different accounts on offer as to what normality involves, and while there are different explanations available of why the biconditional holds true, many people will agree that colour concepts and colour terms satisfy Johnston's requirement for response-dependence.

The questions I wish to discuss here bear on what response-dependence in this sense entails; in particular on what, if anything, it entails for issues of philosophical interest. I argue against two apparent lessons, one relating to how we apply response-dependent terms and concepts, the other relating to the nature of the properties and other entities to which they refer. While rejecting these apparent lessons, however, I defend a third; this concerns the reference-fixing significance of response-dependence as distinct from the application or reference of response-dependent terms. In arguing along these lines I remain broadly faithful to an approach that I have already presented elsewhere (Pettit 1991, 1993).

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1. The application of response-dependent terms: a negative lesson

The claim that it is *a priori* that something is red just in case it is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal circumstances is reminiscent of the sorts of claims offered in analysis of explicitly dispositional terms. It parallels the claim, for example, that something is fragile just in case it is disposed to break under this or that sort of pressure or that it is soluble just in case it is disposed to dissolve on immersion in this or that liquid.

Now with terms for properties like fragility it usually goes without saying that the analysis teaches us an important lesson about how we usually judge, or at least about how we usually check, that something has the property. We ask ourselves whether or not the object is likely to break under the pressure in question; at the limit we may even test for whether it breaks under that pressure. The question, then, is whether the same goes for how we usually judge or check that something is red. Do we ask ourselves about how it is likely to look, or do we test for how it looks, to normal observers in normal conditions?

This question bears on how we think of the property of redness. Does the dispositional character of the biconditional for redness mean that we ordinary folk conceive of redness as an explicitly dispositional property? Does it mean that we treat the term 'red' as a term whose application is to be guided by considerations about the sorts of sensations realised in normal observers in normal conditions? Does it mean that the biconditional gives what I have elsewhere described as the application conditions for the term (Pettit 1991)? Does it mean, in Mark Johnston's (1993, pp. 106–07) phrase, that the concept is response-dispositional?

To all of these questions I believe that the answer should be, no. There are accounts of how the biconditional for redness can hold, and hold as an *a priori* truth, without serving to give the application conditions for the term. Under these accounts we do not think of the property of redness as a disposition, in the way that we think of fragility as a disposition, and yet the *a priori* linkage between redness and the disposition to produce certain sensations of redness is firmly established.

The account that I myself prefer as to how we think of the property of redness is one such story (Pettit 1993, p. 199). I call it an 'ethocentric' account, because it gives a central role to habits of sensation and practices of

correction and the Greek work 'ethos' covers both habit and practice. It goes like this.

1. People have sensations of redness in the presence of red things.
2. Although they may not be aware of those sensations as such, or have a term in which to describe them, redness-sensations lead people to link together those things that elicit the sensations; the things look the same.
3. People typically go by how things look in determining what else belongs to this kind; the presumption is that if something looks similar to established examples of the class, then it belongs to the class.
4. Given the salience of the class of red things, people learn the use of the words 'red' and 'redness' in a more or less ostensive way: from their point of view, redness is that property, the one present here in this object, there in that, and so on.
5. They are sensitive, however, to interpersonal and intertemporal discrepancies between their sensations or judgments, baulking at any discrepancy between times or perhaps individuals in how something looks; they assume that other things being equal redness itself is constant across times and individuals.
6. Thus people are ready to discount how something looks as evidence of its being red or non-red: they display a disposition to discount various discrepant appearances in the course of restoring congruence: the light was bad, it may be surmised, the person was wearing funny glasses, the object was revolving rapidly, or whatever.

This ethocentric account of how we learn and use terms like 'red' and 'redness' is opposed to any suggestion that we are guided in the application of such terms by the biconditional for redness. It has us think of redness in an ostensive manner as a property available to be picked out in perception, not as a property of the dispositional kind exemplified by fragility. It is consistent with our not even being able to understand the biconditional, let alone apply it; for all the account says, for example, we may not have any understanding of what it is for observers and conditions to be normal.

But though the ethocentric account suggests that we think about redness as an ostensive property, not a dispositional one, it still gives us ground for defending something close to the biconditional for redness, and as an *a pri-*

ori matter. Thus it suggests that even if we do not think about redness as dispositional, that property does indeed have a dispositional aspect: if they can name the property, then its presence in something goes *a priori* with the thing's being disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions.

The ethocentric account supports the *a priori* truth of the biconditional, so far as normal observers and normal conditions are understood on an independently attractive pattern (Pettit 1991; 1993, pp. 92–97; 1998 cf Wright 1988). Let 'normal' be defined, not by reference to a list of normal observers and conditions, and not by reference to the effect of normality in enabling people to get things right—not in a whatever-it-takes-way—but rather by reference to ethocentric practices. Let normality be the property pertaining to those individuals and circumstances that are not of a kind with those that are discounted—discounted as unreliable—in the course of resolving discrepancies; let normality be the property, in this sense, of being fit to survive practices of resolving discrepancies.

The notion of normality, so defined, need not be available to people themselves but it is introduced on the basis of their spontaneous practices; it is not an alien imposition. And yet it enables us to say with justification that, assuming they can name the property, something is red just in case it looks red to normal observers in normal circumstances; in saying this, we merely articulate a principle that is implied in the way people trust their habits of sensations and authorise their practices of revision in making judgments of redness. Moreover, it enables us to say that this qualified biconditional is true *a priori*. Anyone who is party to the way people follow their sensations and adjust in face of discrepancies will be in a position to know of the truth of the biconditional; it does not require empirical confirmation.

The upshot, then, is clear. The admission that a term or concept is response-dependent in the sense given by Mark Johnston to that description does not entail that we are guided in our use of it by the biconditional governing the term. It says little or nothing on how we are supposed to think about the property to which the term applies.

2. The reference of response-dependent terms: a negative lesson

In a recent paper Ralph Wedgwood (1996) maintains a similar position on the application of response-dependent terms, arguing that we

need not think of them in the explicitly dispositional way. He defends an uncongenial view, however, on the reference of such terms. He argues that response-dependence gives us a way of characterising the lesser objectivity of some properties. So far I need not be opposed. But in the course of that argument he suggests, perhaps incautiously—incautiously because unnecessarily—that response-dependent predicates cannot stand for properties that objects exemplify 'independently of our mental responses'. Here I differ. I think that the property to which a response-dependent predicate refers—or, more generally, the entity to which a response-dependent term refers—need not be mentally dependent in this sense.

What would it be for the property of redness to be mentally dependent in a relevant way? I shall assume that redness will be dependent if it is the higher-order property of being such that—of having such lower-order properties that—the bearer would look red to normal observers in normal conditions. Such a property is a disposition, not just the ground of a disposition, and its very realisation presupposes that the category of normal observers and normal conditions is well-defined; it presupposes that there is at least a possible world where the term 'normal', as we have defined it here, refers to determinate observers and conditions.

Why is it necessary for the realisation of the property in question—dispositional redness, as we may call it—that there are normal observers and conditions, not in the actual world, but only in a possible world; that is, in the actual world or in some other possible world? The reason will be evident from an analogy. In order to be soluble an object must be such that it would dissolve in liquids, or at least in certain liquids. But an object would remain soluble in the actual world even if everything here froze up and there were no actual liquids available; it would remain soluble so far as it remains the case that it would dissolve in liquids: it dissolves in liquids at the nearest possible world where liquids are available.

It is worth noticing that though the reality of dispositional redness only requires the possibility of normal observers and normal conditions—though its mental independence is only compromised to that limited extent—the reality of a rigidified cousin of dispositional redness requires the actuality of such observers and conditions. Suppose the biconditional for redness, as some may think appropriate, requires that the red object is disposed actually to look red to normal observers in normal conditions; suppose that redness is taken to be that dispositional property that involves

looking red to such normal observers, and in such normal conditions, as materialise in the actual world. In that case the reality of dispositional redness—rigidified dispositional redness—presupposes that such observers and such conditions are available in the actual world, not just in some possible world.

Not only would the mental independence of dispositional redness be further compromised if that property is assumed to be rigidified. It is also worth noting that the independence would be compromised along a different dimension—and perhaps in a more significant way—in the event of a second sort of assumption. We characterised dispositional redness as that higher-order property of being such that the bearer would look red to normal observers in normal conditions and we added, parenthetically, that being such that it would look that way involves having suitable lower-order properties. But suppose it is assumed that this parenthetical addition is misleading. Suppose it is assumed that as between something that would look red in suitable circumstances and something that wouldn't there need be no difference in categorical lower-order properties. Suppose it is assumed, in other words, that dispositional redness is a bare or empty disposition with no categorical grounding. Such bare dispositional redness, whether rigidified or not, would be lacking mental independence along a very important dimension. It would be such that having the property comes to nothing more or less than normally seeming to have the property, whether normally seeming to have it in the actual world or in some possible world.

We have seen that redness would be dependent on our mental responses in the event of being identical with dispositional redness, and particularly in the event of being identical with rigidified or bare dispositional redness. But I want to show now that the truth of the *a priori* biconditional for redness—or, strictly, of the qualified version—does not entail that redness is dispositional redness. We can see how that *a priori* biconditional might remain true even in the event of redness being non-dispositional.

We can see how it would remain true, specifically, in the event of redness being identified not with the higher-order property of being such as to look red but with the suchness in question. Under the possibility I have in mind, redness is the lower-order property—no doubt, the lower-order disjunctive property—that makes things look red in suitable circumstances. If you prefer, it is the property that discharges the role that is characteristic of redness, making things look red in suitable circumstances. It is the realiser property,

as we might say, not the role or dispositional property (Jackson and Pettit 1988).

If redness is the realiser property in this sense then it should be clear that it is not particularly dependent for its exemplification on our mental responses. If a certain molecular structure—perhaps we should say a certain disjunction of structures—realises the fragility role, making things break under appropriate pressures, that does not mean that it depends in any way for its exemplification on such breaking. And if a certain property realises the redness role, making things look red in suitable circumstances, that does not mean that it depends in any way for its exemplification on such looking. The connection between the molecular structure and the breaking is contingent, not necessary; and similarly the connection between the realiser property for redness and the looking will be contingent too.

Is there any problem in continuing to defend the ethocentric story, and in particular the qualified biconditional for redness, if redness is the realiser property rather than the role or dispositional property? No, for pretty straightforward reasons.¹ Even if redness is identified with a mentally independent, perfectly objective property, there remains a question, in David Lewis's phrasing, as to why this property and not some other gets to deserve the name of 'red'. Any story that sustains the *a priori* biconditional for redness, and in particular the ethocentric story presented, can be seen as providing an answer to that question.

Why does a certain molecular structure deserve the name of 'fragile', if indeed we identify fragility with the property that realises fragility, and not with the dispositional property itself? Obviously the answer is that it is that structure, and not any other, which leads things to break under certain circumstances. The linkage with breaking does not go to the heart of the property in question, as we have noticed; the property does not depend for its realisation on that relationship. But the linkage does go to the heart of explaining why the word 'fragile' is used with reference to the presence of that property and not any other.

1. If the reasons seem straightforward to me, that is probably because I have enjoyed the great benefit, over many years, of talking about these matters with Frank Jackson. His John Locke lectures are a source of illumination on relevant questions; see Jackson 1998.

something is red if and only if it looks red to normal observers in normal conditions. If redness is identified with a mind-independent property, the reason will relate to how that property gets to deserve the name of 'red'. If redness is identified with any mind-dependent property—say, with dispositional redness, whether or not in rigidified or bare versions—other reasons will apply.

What I now wish to point out, however, is that no matter how redness is construed ontologically, one single reason is going to be available to explain why the term 'red' is response-dependent. It remains the case under each available ontology that we have to explain why the property in question gets to deserve the name of 'red'. And under each ontology the most plausible explanation—say, the explanation implicit in the ethocentric story—will entail that something is red if and only if it looks red to normal observers in normal conditions. The mode in which the reference of 'red' is fixed explains the response-dependence of the term under all ontological theories of redness. It does not serve in that explanatory role just for the case where redness is taken as a mind-independent property.

No matter what terms or what things are in question, there is always an issue as to why this or that term—this or that term in our mouths—refers to this or that thing. The question bears on what it is about that thing which makes it the right referent for the term. It concerns, not the matter of what the referent is, but the way in which it is fixed that that is entitled to be the referent.

Consider the term 'water'. Those of us schooled in the intuitions of direct reference will have little doubt about what it is that this term refers to, and refers to in all possible worlds as well as in the actual world: it rigidly refers to the natural kind that is chemically designated as H_2O . But even with a term like this there is a question as to how it is fixed that H_2O is the referent.

Suppose we inhabited and interpreted the word 'water' in a different actual world: in a world, let us say, where the stuff inhabitants drink and the stuff in which they wash, the stuff that occupies the seas and falls from the skies, is not H_2O but XYZ; a world, as we can put it, in which XYZ plays the watery role that H_2O plays in the familiar actual world. What would the word 'water' refer to in our mouths in such a world? Clearly XYZ. Clearly XYZ, because the referent of 'water' is determined in any world—in any world that is given the place of the actual world—by appeal to the watery

Why does a certain realiser property deserve the name of 'red', if indeed we identify redness with the realiser property and not with the dispositional one? By analogy, the answer must be that it is that property, and not any other, which leads things to look red under suitable circumstances. The linkage with looking red will not compromise the ontology of the property, making it depend for its exemplification on such looking. But under any plausible story it will explain why the word 'red' is used with reference to the presence of that property and not any other.

Why is it *a priori*, then, that if they can name the property, something is red if and only if it looks red to normal observers in normal conditions? Not because the property of redness is necessarily tied up with looking red in such circumstances. Rather, because the property in question—the lower-order realiser property, as we are taking it to be—happens to be that property which causes things to look red to us under suitable circumstances. We are guided by how things look in determining what is red and what is not; this is borne out by the ethocentric story and by every plausible rival. And so it is *a priori*—it is knowable from a knowledge of how we are guided—that a certain mind-independent property will count as redness if and only if it engenders appropriate looks.

3. Fixing the reference of response-dependent terms: a positive lesson

I argued in the last section that a response-dependent term like 'red' may refer to a perfectly mind-independent property: specifically, to the property that realises the redness role, rather than to the dispositional or role property. I argued, in particular, that consistently with having such a reference we can still understand why the term should be response-dependent: why it should be governed by an appropriate *a priori* biconditional. Consistently with 'red' referring to a mind-independent property, there will still be a question as to why that property gets to be identified as redness. And the answer to that question must be that given how we use the word 'red', it is *a priori* knowable that it will refer to a property that causes things to look red. I now want to generalise this line of argument, defending a positive position on the significance of response-dependence.

For all that I have said so far, it might be that as we vary our views on the ontology of redness we will find different reasons for why the term should be response-dependent: different reasons for why it should be *a priori* that

role. Whereas that role picks out H_2O here, it would pick out XYZ, if the world imagined occupied the place of the actual world.

The term 'water' is a rigid designator, as we mentioned, so that starting from a particular world as actual, the referent is the same at other possible worlds as it is at that world; it is always H_2O , if the starting point is our actual world; it is always XYZ, if the starting point is the other world. But even with a term like water, so we can now see, there is a difference between the question as to what the referent of the term is and the question as to what it is that makes that referent appropriate: what it is that entitles the thing in question to be described in that term.

As it is with water, so it is with other terms. There is always a question, not just about what the referents are, but also about what fixes those referents as appropriate. And we show that we have a fair sense of the answer to that question so far as we are able to say, not just what the terms actually refer to, but also what they would refer to in the event of a different world occupying the place of the actual world.

Let us go back now to response-dependent terms, in particular to the predicate 'red'. No matter what redness is, there is always going to be a question as to what makes the property in question the appropriate referent for the term. And no matter what redness is, we are surely all going to say that what makes that property appropriate as a referent is the fact that it co-varies with things looking red, at least when observers and conditions are normal. Suppose we inhabited and interpreted the word 'red' in a world that was different from the actual one in this or that respect. What would the word 'red' refer to in that case? No matter what ontology we espouse, we will identify the referent on the basis of what would look red to normal observers in normal conditions in such a world.

Let redness be a mind-independent property and the reason something is red if and only if it looks red in suitable circumstances has to do with why that property deserves to be called 'red'. But let redness be a mind-dependent property and the same consideration applies. What fixes it that the higher-order property of being such as to look red in suitable circumstances deserves to be called by the name of 'redness', if indeed it is what we call by that name? The fact, clearly, that our use of the term 'red' is guided by how things look in such circumstances. Quite independently of other considerations, that fact and that fact alone is sufficient to explain why it is a *priori*

that something is red if and only if it looks red to normal observers in normal conditions.

The emerging lesson is that quite independently of ontological considerations, it is possible to understand why a certain term is response-dependent, being governed by a suitable *a priori* biconditional. To the extent that our use of the term in question is answerable to suitable looks or to things like looks—to the extent that an ethocentric style of story holds true—the referent of the term is going to deserve that name by virtue of involving suitable looks. And to that extent there will be grounds for a corresponding *a priori* biconditional; this will serve to express the answerability of the term to the way things look, not to communicate anything about the ontology of the item in question.

I have argued that the response-dependence of certain terms—their connection with a suitable *a priori* biconditional—is fully explained by the way their referents are fixed as appropriate and I have laboured the point that this is so whether those referents be taken to be mind-independent or mind-dependent in character. But what does remain true, of course, is that under the sort of ontology that presents redness, for example, as a mind-dependent property, the biconditional may have dual or multiple significance. It may serve, not just as a way of marking how reference is fixed for the corresponding term, but also as a way of giving the essence of the property in question. Thus if redness is the higher-order property of being such as to look red in suitable circumstances, the biconditional has ontological significance as well as significance in the explanation of reference-fixing. This is what gives Wedgwood an opening for his project of using response-dependence in the attempt to characterise the lesser objectivity of some properties.

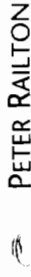
In conclusion, a commitment. I have remained studiously neutral here and in earlier publications on precisely which property should be identified with redness. But I should just mention that the view that redness is a realist property, not a role or dispositional property, fits most comfortably with the ethocentric story. Under that story redness is picked out ostensibly as that property which is present here in this object, there in that, where its salience for ostension depends on our enjoying certain sensations in the presence of the objects in question. But the property picked out ostensibly in that way is quite naturally cast as the lower-order property that lies at the causal origin of the sensations rather than with the higher-order property that consists in having a suitable lower-order producer of sensations. It is

that property which makes an impact on us in the first place, not the higher-order property that is defined by reference to it.

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PETER RAILTON

Red, Bitter, Good

1.

Valuing and evaluation are pervasive features of our lives, yet their purported object, value, has proven puzzling. Many philosophers have concluded that we do best to explain it away—to develop an understanding of valuing and evaluation without objectifying value. A principal motive for such "anti-reificationism" has been the belief that attributions of value are essentially expressions of subjective responses to the non-evaluative features of the world. No evaluative objects are needed to answer to these judgments: value is projected upon the world, not discovered in it.

Recently, however, interest has grown in philosophical approaches to value that seek to explain it as involving a subjective response without thereby explaining it away. Value might be akin to a secondary quality, such as color. Of course color attribution is linked to a sensibility on our part, but this need not in itself impugn our familiar ways of talking about color—that objects indeed are colored, that their colors can (and often do) guide our color judgments, and so on. Perhaps we could be led to question these familiar ways of talking about color if we could be convinced that color perception or color discourse somehow systematically misrepresents the world. But such claims would require substantial further argument and do not follow simply from the observation that rationally-optional sensibilities are implicated in color perception.

How good is the analogy between color and value? An adequate answer

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