

# Dispositions and Ethics

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## 1. Metaphysics in Ethics

Is there much of a connection between dispositions and ethics? It would seem not if one judges by the dearth of papers and books on such a topic (the Smith et. al. 1989 symposium is a rare exception). Dispositions have become a central issue in philosophy but the focus of attention has been on all the metaphysical issues they raise (Mumford 1998, Molnar 2003, Kistler and Gnessounou eds 2007, Bird 2007, Handfield ed. 2009, Marmodoro ed. 2010, for example). Are they real properties? What is their causal role? How do they relate to categorical properties? These are worthy debates and they are ongoing. We need not await a definitive solution, however, before considering the role of dispositions in other areas.

We will argue that despite the relative neglect of the topic, dispositions and dispositionality are absolutely central to ethics. We will go so far as to suggest even that they are a precondition for some of the key debates and concepts. Ethics rests on a number of notions that are either dispositional in character or involve real dispositions – some say powers – at work. We will not argue for the reality of dispositions here. Others attempt that elsewhere. But it is worth recalling Molnar's claim that the reason to accept real powers into our ontology is the work that they can do (Molnar 2003: 186). We want to add to that the work they do in moral philosophy.

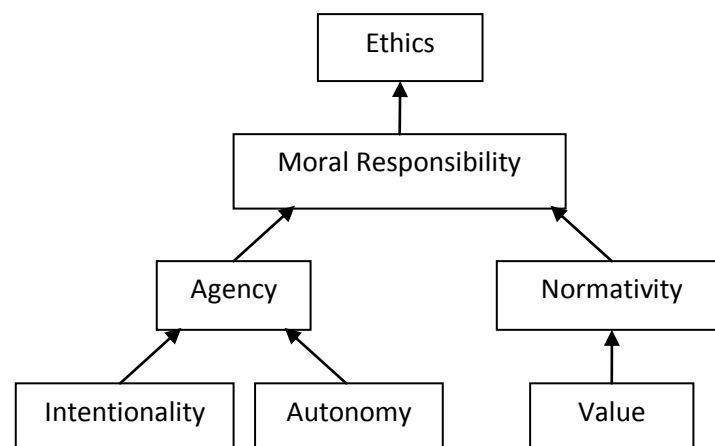


Figure 1: the architecture of ethics

Our argument is that the key notions that support the possibility of ethics are ones best explained ontologically by the existence of dispositions. We offer a big picture, which shows how a dispositional interpretation unites various moral phenomena. Moral responsibility is a precondition

for a substantial part of ethics, for example, and it is a thoroughly dispositional notion requiring what Mumford and Anjum (2011a) have called the dispositional modality. But moral responsibility also depends crucially on there being agents who hold that responsibility. Agency requires there to be both autonomy and intentionality and each of these involves the causal powers of the agents. Moral responsibility also depends on there being normativity. There must be something that ought to be (or ought not to be) if we are to hold agents to account. And normativity rests ultimately, we suggest, on the existence of value. Finally, we will argue that value itself is plausibly best explained as a mutual manifestation between the powers of perceivers and objects. The full moral architecture for which we argue is represented in figure 1, where the upward arrows represent the lower phenomena underpinning the relatively higher phenomena. Ethics thus appears, if this picture is credible, to be dispositional all the way through.

It has to be said that the lack of a connection drawn between ethics and the metaphysics of dispositions is not a singular oversight. There are grounds on which to claim that philosophers have treated metaphysics and ethics generally as separate and unconnected spheres. The roots of this, we suggest, lie within an acceptance of Hume's fact-value dichotomy (Hume 1739: Book III, part I, sect. I). What is to be valued, on Hume's account, is sharply separated from what there is in the world: from the facts, from the metaphysics. The consequence of the dichotomy is to demolish the bridge from metaphysics to ethics. Science deals with what there is: professing to be neutral, objective, descriptive and quantitative, while in no way determining the prescriptive and some think subjective matters of what we should value.

As Jonas (1984: 44), Putnam (2002) and Lie and Wickson (2011) have pointed out, however, the fact-value dichotomy is not metaphysically neutral. It needs the support of a particular metaphysical thesis to stand as an inescapable truth. If we understand everything in the world as either purely contingent (the matters of fact) or necessary (relations of ideas) – a view we will call *modal dualism* – there seems to be no room left for value. Value, we will argue, essentially involves the dispositional modality, which is neither pure necessity nor pure contingency. Hume has, therefore, a sphere of metaphysics that automatically excludes value. It is this metaphysical basis of the fact-value dichotomy that the dispositional view can challenge. We will offer an account of value that permits it to be brought back into nature and weakens the sharp distinction Hume has drawn between fact and value. The upshot is that while we do not challenge Hume's claim that you cannot *derive* an ought from an is, the right metaphysical basis at least makes value possible. Dispositions, it thus seems, are vital to ethics.

## **2. Moral responsibility**

We take it that a precondition of much of ethics is that there is responsibility. Not all responsibility need be moral. In a lifeless universe, a planet could be responsible for casting a shadow on its moon, but it is not morally responsible for doing so. It is moral responsibility that concerns us in ethics and we will say later what makes a responsibility a moral one. It will be normativity, and ultimately value, but we set them aside for now. Ethics is not concerned only with moral responsibility, however. One might discuss whether there are objectively existing moral properties, for instance, setting aside issues of praise or blame. Perhaps dispositions would have an explanatory role there too. For this

paper, however, we will restrict our discussion to that part of ethics that is premised on there being moral responsibility, which is arguably still a large part.

What should we say about moral responsibility? We should note first that it is primarily a causal notion. The best account of what it is to be responsible for something is that it is to be a cause of it. Such a view requires qualification, however. It is the paradigm case of responsibility that involves causation but there is also a non-paradigmatic case that doesn't. We say this because, as Moore (2009: ch. 3) ably shows, another ground for responsibility is omission. Suppose we stand idly by while a man drowns in a lake, refusing even to throw him the float to which we have easy access. We might then have responsibility for his death even though we did nothing (and, in this case, *because* we did nothing). Omissions are not causings (see also Mumford and Anjum, forthcoming a) but, rather, absences of causings. While we can have responsibility without causation, however, this should not deflect us from acknowledging the close connection between responsibility and causation. The core case, and arguably the one in which there is most responsibility, is the one in which causation has occurred.

Consider our drowning man, again. We tend to feel that someone has the greatest responsibility for his death if they caused his death, for example if they pushed him in. Moore (2009: 56) discusses a case that perhaps brings this more into focus. Two men are tasked with bathing babies. The first watches the infant sink under the water and drown, without intervening to save her. The second actively pushes and holds the baby underwater until she is dead. Both are morally responsible for terrible deaths. Our intuition, however, is that among these two horrific crimes, the act is even worse than the omission. The act caused the harm while the omission 'merely' failed to prevent it.

We thus defend the view that moral responsibility is primarily a causal notion. And we think also that causation is a thoroughly dispositional notion, following a rich vein of literature in which causation is the exercise of causal power (Bhaskar 1975, Harré and Madden 1975, Molnar 2003, Mumford and Anjum 2011b). We can also say what it is for someone to be a morally responsible cause, namely through exercising their agency. But first we should explain more about the dispositional modality and its connection with moral responsibility.

We argue that moral responsibility rests on the dispositional modality. This is a crucial but still relatively novel notion that, we argue, applies to many of the notions of figure 1 that we will say are vital to ethics. We will spend some time explaining this dispositional modality (see Mumford and Anjum 2011b: ch. 8, though they cite Aquinas as precursor).

Much of modern metaphysics seems to present us with a choice between Humeanism, in which all is purely contingent and, as Hume says, 'loose and separate' and anti-Humeanism which urges a necessitarian view of the world. Lewis (1986) is probably the most influential advocate of neo-Humeanism in which all is contingent. The world – each world in his case – is depicted as a mosaic of isolated, discrete and unconnected things (Lewis 1986: ix). The reaction to Humeanism has taken the form of necessitarianism. Armstrong (1983) has a weak version, in which laws of nature involve natural necessitation relations but these are ultimately contingent: they might have been otherwise. A number of fully-blown necessitarian theories of nature have been promoted (Harré and Madden 1975, Mumford 2004, Bird 2007).

The application of this essentially logical distinction to nature, however, where there is a stark choice between pure contingency and necessity, is a mistake. As Mumford and Anjum have argued recently, Hume claimed that to believe in powers was to believe in necessities in nature. He was then able to argue persuasively that there was no necessity in nature. Any natural cause could be prevented or there was at least the possibility of prevention (Hume 1739: 86-7). And if we could have the typical cause for an effect but without the effect, due to the presence also of a further interfering factor, then that cause does not necessitate its effect even on the occasions where it successfully produces it. The details of this argument have been given elsewhere (Mumford and Anjum 2011b: ch. 3).

Hume set a trap into which his opponents indeed fell. Many defenders of powers accepted his characterisation of powers as necessities but could then be defeated by an argument from prevention and interference. But that is the wrong characterisation of powers and, particularly, of their modal force.

The idea of the dispositional modality is that powers in nature tend, but no more than tend, towards their outcomes: their manifestations. When a match is struck, for example, it tends to light. But it doesn't always and there is never a guarantee that it will. Even if the match does light, we could still say that had there been another factor present, high humidity for example, it need not have. If we can add further factors to affect the outcome, then clearly we are not talking about necessity as classically conceived in philosophy, where outcomes would be unaffected by antecedent strengtheners. Yet disposing towards an outcome is more than that outcome being one completely contingent possibility among many others. Breaking is not just one mere possibility for a dropped and fragile thing among all the rest, such as it catching alight or turning into a chicken. There is a special and far more intimate connection that fragility has to breaking than it has to catching alight. Of all the possibilities, the power selects a subset towards which it disposes. If in nature we have a modal connection that seems to be something considerably more than pure contingency, but considerably less than necessity, then it seems that we must permit a third modal value, and this is what we call the dispositional modality. It is a challenge to the modal dualism of necessity and pure contingency. The dispositional modality seems to be the natural one, by which we mean the modality of natural causal processes. Causes tend, but no more than tend, towards their effects. They nevertheless can succeed and in such cases they have indeed produced their effects but not by necessitating them.

Metaphysicians may need more persuasion but as it is not our task to prove the dispositional modality of nature, we will refer the reader elsewhere (Mumford and Anjum 2011b). Our purpose here is to show its application in ethics. We will see that this dispositional modality applies to a host of ethical concepts, the first being moral responsibility.

The metaphysics of modal dualism, which we believe reflects that of Hume's fork, arguably leaves no place for moral responsibility. One could suggest also that it is what raises free will as a problem. The argument is as follows. *Prima facie*, one cannot be responsible for what happened of necessity. If it *had* to happen, then it seems one had no control over it. One could not have done otherwise. Necessity, then, permits no moral responsibility. But pure contingency would seem to fare no better. There has to be a stronger than purely contingent connection between one's actions and outcomes if one is to have responsibility for them. With pure contingency, anything could happen. When we throw water on flames, it could increase them, or cause an explosion, or that they turn to dust. (We

will discuss the possibility of there being a contingent but constant conjunction between actions and outcomes later, section 3). It seems, therefore, that for moral responsibility, which we say is a precondition of ethics, we need something that is neither necessity nor pure contingency but in between. The connection between cause and effect must, we argue, exhibit the dispositional modality. Responsibility seems premised on the grounds that there is something – the object of ethical evaluation – that succeeded in causing an outcome but without necessitation. It could have failed to do so. And yet it must have had a more than purely contingent connection to that outcome: it must have had at least a disposition to have produced it.

The latter point seems closely reflected in our evaluations of moral responsibility. Occasionally an outcome is produced by a cause that had only a negligible disposition towards producing it. Suppose through a coincidental alignment of other factors, a man eating an apple in the street leads to a second man robbing a bank. Was the first man responsible for the bank robbing? Very little, one would think, though it would depend on the detail of the story. One's evaluation would be based, presumably, on the idea that there is no significantly strong disposition towards bank robbing from apple eating. The extent of responsibility seems aligned to the strength of the disposition involved. A man who explodes a bomb in a busy town square has a very great responsibility for any deaths that result because exploding bombs tend to kill. They have a significantly strong disposition towards that outcome. The case also shows that a lack of necessity is entirely consistent with responsibility. It would be no defence for the bomber to claim that they have no responsibility because their planting of the bomb did not necessitate the explosion. It didn't. A bird could have come and pecked free the fuse wire in time. But it is adequate for such responsibility to have produced harm even if one didn't ensure it. Having created conditions for a significant disposition towards it is enough.

### **3. Agency**

We said that one has responsibility in the paradigm case for what one has caused, allowing an exception for the case of omissions. But we can also see that causation alone is insufficient for responsibility. In the first place, we should restrict the claim to what has been caused through agency. It is possible to cause harm or good but without responsibility where it was an accident or unintended consequence. A man with cerebral palsy, for instance, could kick out in a spasm and connect with a bystander. But he is not morally responsible for the resultant harm even though he is causally responsible for it. In the opposite case, it may be more likely that someone would wrongfully claim credit for an unintended good they have caused, but parity of reasoning suggests that they have no true right to claim praise.

What is the reasoning in these cases? We again give an answer in terms of powers. One is responsible not simply for what one has caused but for one's actions; in other words for what one has caused as an agent. As depicted in figure 1, however, there are further details to be given in terms of intentionality and autonomy. To be an agent is to deliberately and freely exercise one's causal powers in order to bring about some effect. It hardly needs saying that this is one reason why it is usually human beings that are held morally responsible for what they cause. There is plenty of harm caused by nature, in volcanoes, hurricanes and earthquakes, and caused by predatory animals, but without agency we do not hold these things morally responsible even though they are causally so. In contrast, humans are usually powerful actors. We have a wide range of causal powers that we

are able to deploy with purpose to bring about outcomes. Our powers are not always something we control, though, as the cerebral palsy case illustrates. When a power is under one's control, one is able to choose when and how to deploy it.

But how much do we need to commit to realism about such powers in order to gain the notion of agency? Is the existence of agents itself proof of the reality of powers? It would seem surprising if it was. The thought would be that while agency is clearly a causal notion, it is a notion that is entirely neutral on the abstruse metaphysical issue of what causation itself consists in. Would we really want to say, for example, that there are agents only if the dispositional theory of causation were true? And there are different dispositional theories of causation so we would have to identify a particular variety of the theory that was adequately realist about powers.

It is worth stating nevertheless that a case can be made for it only being in real empowerment that we have genuine agency. This sort of argument has been given by Groff (2012), for instance. The argument has a resemblance with the aforementioned point that one wouldn't have responsibility if there was a wholly contingent relation between one's actions and their outcomes.

Suppose causation consisted in a purely contingent regularity, as Hume's constant conjunction account suggests. When an agent causes some outcome it would mean, according to this view, that there was a regularity between a type of action – a person's bodily movements or whatever – and a particular kind of outcome. The movement would be constantly conjoined with the outcome. When she kicks a football, for instance, it moves rapidly away with momentum and direction. For the kick to have caused the ball to move, however, all kicks at footballs, administered by various people at various times, are followed by those balls moving away.

If there is nothing more to causation than a contingent regularity, therefore, whoever kicked the ball merely performed a bodily movement that was part of a pattern of constantly conjoined events. On Hume's theory, the only reason we think the kick caused the ball's movement is that it is part of the regular pattern. One could never infer from a single instance, for example, that the kicking made the ball move.

The question now is whether this leaves us with a credible theory of agency. Can one really be the agent unless one brought something about? And could I really have the close interest in my actions that I obviously do if they never brought other events about but, in line with the theory, merely were followed by those events in a way that resembling events also were? And would I have such an interest if I realised that there was no real connection between what I did and what it produced? Everything is loose and separate, according to Hume (1739, p. 54), so there really is only pure contingency between one thing and another. Hence, Hume's inductive scepticism would apply. There would be no rational basis for assuming that the future would be like the past. Any such view would spring from custom and habit. Rationally, the ball is just as likely to turn to dust when I kick it as it is to move away with momentum.

Groff's charge is, therefore, that unless the causation that is involved has sufficient power, agency would not deserve the name and we would have no rational basis for acting as we do. Deflationary theories of causation weaken agency so much that, if that were all we had at our disposal, it would no longer be justified to call us agents. With that would also fall moral responsibility and thus a major part of ethics. If we genuinely produce outcomes, we can be held morally responsible for

them. If we can produce nothing, it looks like we have no responsibility. Without a stronger-than-contingent connection, it looks like we could not even have responsibility for our omissions; for if all is contingent then omitting to throw the drowning man a float has no stronger nor lesser connection to him drowning than if one instead throws it.

#### 4. Intentionality

Agency is not a simple matter. At least two further dispositional notions are required for it. The first is intentionality and the second is autonomy. Being an agent requires an ability to form intentions, where intentions are one among the class of mental phenomena that exhibit the quality of intentionality, according to Brentano (1874). The kick caused by a spasm does not count as agency because there was no intention behind it.

The connection between intending and responsibility is a complex one, however. It seems necessary to separate the issue of unintended consequences, for which one often is held morally responsible. Agent *a* may intentionally bring about X without realising that X will bring about Y, where they do not intend Y. One could intentionally discard a cigarette that then causes a fire without intentionally causing a fire. Moral responsibility may rest in foreseeability though the connection between this and responsibility is complex and disputed (Moore 2009: chs 8-10). As in the case discussed earlier, causation provides the paradigmatic grounds for responsibility. But there could also be non-paradigmatic cases, so could we say the same of intentionality? Paradigmatic cases will be intentional even if there are some non-paradigmatic cases where we attribute responsibility without it.

We say that intentionality is a dispositional notion. In the simplest sense, this means only that it is an ability, of minded creatures. It is a power that they sometimes exercise but often don't, when sleeping for instance. But intentionality is also dispositional in the more sophisticated sense that it exhibits the dispositional modality. If we stick to the case of intentions, for that is the intentional phenomena most relevant to moral responsibility, we find the dispositional modality evident in the following. In the first place, one knowingly aims only for that which is less than necessary. One might unknowingly aim for the necessary but it is irrational to both know and understand that X is necessary and to aim for X. Suppose one believes that it is metaphysically necessary that a person can only be in one place – a spatial region – at one time. Then plausibly it is irrational to aim at that. And intentionality falls short of necessity in another, more obvious way. What one intends to bring about is not necessitated. We may intend to bring happiness to another and do everything in our power to succeed in that intention but we have to acknowledge that there is always the possibility of failure. This could be explained in just the way the dispositional modality was explained. There could be something else – an additive interferer – that gets in the way of the intended outcome. The person whom we intend to make happy receives bad news, for instance. The actual outcomes of our intentional acts are therefore not entirely in our control, since we cannot control all the factors outside our own acts that might interfere with the intended outcome.

Yet clearly there is more than pure contingency at work. When one intends, one intends some more or less specific outcome out of all those that are merely possible. We can call this the intentional object of the intention but it has long been acknowledged that there is a degree of unspecificity

(Molnar 2003: 64). One intends to buy an ice-cream, for instance; but maybe not any specific kind and neither usually a particular token of the kind. The intention focuses on a range of target actions that are a limited subset of all the many actions possible.

This seems entirely analogous to the causal case. Fragility disposes towards breaking, which is a limited but also unspecific range of possibilities. Apart from a very exceptional case, a fragile object disposes to breaking generally rather than towards breaking at a particular time and place and in a particular way even though, of course, if the vase does break it will indeed break at a specific place and time and in a specific way.

Such is the closeness of the notions of dispositionality and intentionality that both Place (1996) and Molnar (2003: ch. 3) have tried to explain dispositions in terms of intentionality. They see dispositions as directed towards their manifestations and capable of exhibiting intentional inexistence. Intentionality is the criterion of the dispositional rather than of the mental, and the mental counts as intentional only to the extent that it itself is a dispositional phenomenon.

We argue that Place and Molnar have the direction of explanation the wrong way round (Mumford and Anjum 2011b: 186). Intentionality doesn't explain dispositions but dispositions explain intentionality. We follow instead the tradition of Armstrong (1968: chs 7-11) in which intentionality is explained in causal dispositional terms, which holds the prospect of a naturalisation of intentionality. The modality of intentionality derives from the dispositions upon which it rests. And although we have concentrated on intentions because of their relevance to moral responsibility, what we say goes *mutatis mutandis* for other intentional phenomena, such as beliefs, hopes, perceptions, and so on.

## 5. Autonomy

The cerebral palsy case fails to count as agency for lack of both intentionality and autonomy. The kick that the sufferer administers to the bystander is not an act of agency because there was no intention to kick. But an intention to kick alone is inadequate because the sufferer also has no control over their movements. In this respect, the sufferer lacks autonomy (though there are many other areas in which they will have it). In other words, the sufferer of cp is not an agent with respect to the kick even if they had an intention to kick at the time they did. Without control over their movements, the intention to kick had no relevance to the movement with which it coincided.

We should take autonomy as a second condition on agency, therefore, distinct from the issue of intentionality. Clearly there can be the first without the second. One could be free to visit Kazakhstan without ever having the intention to do so, or have the intention to visit North Korea without ever having the freedom to do so. No doubt there are prisoners who intend to escape yet of course lack the liberty to do so. We are equating notions such as autonomy, freedom and liberty here, while in some contexts others may find it useful to draw distinctions between them.

The dispositional nature of autonomy was evident in our notions of agency and responsibility. I am not autonomous if my movements are necessitated but nor if they are completely contingent. The connection between my desires and behaviour cannot be a wholly contingent one. To be free I must



be both able to do something, an ability that complete contingency between desire and behaviour would disallow; but I must also be able not to do so, which necessity would disallow.

There is much more to discuss on the topic of autonomy. What does it really involve? Is it relative to certain interests and types of domain? I may in the physical sense be free to drop litter but I am not legally free to do so. On many of these issues there will be a close connection between autonomy and powers. If we consider the issue of negative versus positive conceptions of liberty, for example (Berlin 1958), we might reason on the following lines. On a negative conception of liberty I am free to do X merely if there is no rule against me doing so. I would thus be free to play the violin even if I have no ability with it because I was never taught. Liberty is sometimes used in this way. But on a positive conception, a notion of empowerment is more to the fore. Freedom is not just about absence of constraint but, according to some, about getting what you want. And thus empowerment – the having of powers – becomes a vital ingredient of the positive conception. Here, I am free to play the violin, or swim, or speak Norwegian, only once I have the power to do so. The more powers one has – the more one is able – then the more one is free. Most such powers are acquired, through training and education, and thus these become sources of freedom. And on this dispositional account of autonomy, one cannot assume that all citizens are equally free just because they are subject to the same laws. That might be the case on the negative conception but clearly if some are more empowered than others then it seems quite defensible to say that they are more free.

This completes our dispositional account of agency. We said that it was one of two conditions for moral responsibility. And we said that agency had two further preconditions for its paradigm instances: intentionality and autonomy. These, we argued, are disposition-laden notions. We need not claim that these two concepts exhaust agency, however, nor that we have found all that is dispositional about agency, but a complete account is not our aim. We seek only to show that there is after all a close connection between dispositions and ethics, hence metaphysics and ethics.

## **6. Normativity**

We have thus far followed the left-hand branch of our proposed moral architecture, as depicted in figure 1. Agency, we said, was a requirement of moral responsibility. But there is another requirement, which we think of as normativity. The thought is that agency would not itself be adequate for moral responsibility were it not for there being some things that we ought to do and other things that we ought not to do. Many of our actions have no or only a negligible moral value. Suppose you make a sound in private, quietly humming a tune to yourself. You can have a non-moral responsibility for the sound produced because you causally produced it. But, for there to be a specifically moral responsibility, there needs also to be a normative dimension that impinges on our actions. It can be safely assumed that in most circumstances it is neither the case that one ought to hum in private nor that one ought not to hum.

As a rule of thumb, when one acts as one ought, one's actions are morally acceptable or even praiseworthy. When one acts as one ought not, one's actions are morally unacceptable or blameworthy. When one's act goes above and beyond what one ought to do, one's action is supererogatory (a term introduced by Urmson 1958). And so many of our other moral notions spring

from this. The notion of an obligation, for example, comes from there being something that we ought to do. But what, one may wonder, does this have to do with dispositions?

In a now familiar move, we will first claim that normativity is a dispositional notion to the extent that it too exhibits the dispositional modality. That one ought to do X does not necessitate X. We ought to be kind to animals, for instance, but animal cruelty nevertheless exists. But that one ought to do Y says more than that Y is a mere possibility. There are many things that you could do but only a selective subset of them are the actions that one ought to perform; and similarly for those one ought not to perform. So if one ought to be considerate, then this says more than that consideration is one possible way of behaving: merely one among many possibilities. It is favoured or selected in some way: targeted as the special subset of all the possible actions to which one's actions should be aimed. This is structurally parallel, we argue, to the way that breaking is a subset of possibilities to which powers dispose and kicking might be the subset of actions towards which an intention could dispose. We have, therefore, the same dispositional modality, for ought requires something that is more than purely contingent but less than necessary.

There is a possible objection to this account of the modality of normativity, which comes from a broadly Kantian perspective. Suppose one thinks that reason dictates morality, for instance, then what one ought to do becomes equated with what you rationally *must* do. Would that mean that morality necessitated our actions? It may be that you have no choice but to obey the categorical imperative, for instance. But this is to confuse two issues. It may be a matter of necessity what the precepts are: they state what you should or must do. Reason might dictate that you should treat each person as an end in themselves, for instance. But even if such a precept were necessary, it clearly does not necessitate that it is acted upon. People can have failings of rationality and morality. Evidently we can fail to do what we should. When we use the term 'must' in a normative context, whether we have a Kantian perspective on moral imperatives or not, it clearly allows the possibility of failure. Someone might be cruel to animals even if they (normatively) must or should be kind to them. The necessity of a precept is not, therefore, the necessity of an action. In this sense, it remains right to say that normativity concerns what is short of necessity. And this seems correct given the point that if an action were necessitated then any precept is redundant.

Given the modal similarity between dispositionality and normativity, one might wonder whether one of them comes first and can be used to explain the other. E. J. Lowe (1987a, 1987b) suggests a normative account of nature in which dispositions can be understood in normative terms. An acorn ought to grow into an oak tree, for instance. But we do not think that dispositionality can be explained in this way. Again, we take dispositions to be basic. They are parts of the natural world, like properties borne of particulars. They are open to empirical investigation and testing.

What one could think instead, therefore, is that the existence of dispositions could provide the basis on which to naturalise normativity and evidence for such a proposal would be found in the fact that normativity has a dispositional nature. The modality of normativity betrays its dispositional origin. How might such an account proceed? One example could be Hume's view that morality is based on empathy for others: an ability that has the dispositional modality written all over it. We may choose to exercise it but it is far from necessary that everyone does. And there may be other credibly naturalistic accounts of the dispositional origin of normativity too. We will now proceed to develop another, which focuses on the notion of value.

## 7. Value

There is some basis for normativity in the theory of value. The connection would plausibly be something like this: we ought to bring about what is valuable (peace, freedom, kindness) and ought to avoid that which subtracts from value (meanness, destruction, violence). Or one might think of it this way: unless there is something ultimately of value, then normativity seems without foundation. How could one maintain normativity without value? Suppose one thought that, although nothing really was of value, that it was nevertheless worthwhile having normative constraints on behaviour to maintain law and order. But such a view would be founded on the idea that law and order were valuable. If one didn't think so, nor had any other foundations on which they could rest, one would reject the associated norms.

Value remains a mystery, however, particularly for metaphysicians. Guided by the fact-value dichotomy, one is tempted to believe that metaphysics should deal only with the facts, concerning the way the world is, and nothing to do with what ought to be. How the world ought to be is left to the moral philosophers or theologians to decide. But this dichotomy may itself rest on a metaphysical premise that could be challenged.

We argued in section 2 that the dispositional modality was required for moral responsibility. The reason this seems to appear on the value side of the dichotomy may be, however, because modal dualism allows no place for it on the fact side. Modal dualism, as we understand it, is simply the view that there are just two modal values: necessity and contingency. Hume's fork is a statement of such a view. All knowledge of the natural world, he contends, concerns either matters of fact, which for him are loose and separate, unconnected and thus entirely contingent; or it concerns necessities, which are mere relations of ideas and a priori (Hume 1748: IV, Pt 1: 25). Once we accept this dualism, it is, following the dispositional nature of moral responsibility we have offered, impossible for value to find a place on the natural side of the dichotomy, within the realm of facts. Morality and normativity are cast over to the value side.

We have rejected the modal dualism of Hume's fork. If we restrict our metaphysics to the two traditional modal values of philosophy, then we miss what is arguably the most natural and important; the dispositional modality. It is the modality we find in causation (Mumford and Anjum 2011b) and it thus figures in virtually every naturally occurring event. If that is right, then the dispositional modality is as naturalistic as anything and on that basis deserves its place on the fact side of the fact-value dichotomy. And yet, we have argued, it is also the modality of moral responsibility and of normativity. Does that bring those two domains closer to the natural realm of facts? Does it offer a prospect for the dissolution of the dichotomy altogether?

As we have already indicated, one way in which normativity and thus a part of ethics could become one with the realm of facts would be if it could be naturalised in some way. We also offer hope that such a naturalisation would be cashed out in dispositional terms. Perhaps the biggest challenge to such naturalism would be the values themselves. Those brought up on the fact-value dichotomy find it hard to see how value could possibly be a part of the natural world. But we offer a sketch for a theory that, if what we have said so far has had any ring of truth, might sound like a credible starting point.

A dispositional theory of value has potential. It seems able to reconcile a standard opposition of objectivism (or realism) versus subjectivism. A realist position would see value residing in the objective, mind-independent qualities of things or objects. Subjectivism, in contrast, states that all values reside in minds and in the eye of the beholder. Which of these is right? Arguably neither. If a pure subjectivism were true then there could be no meaningful disagreement about values, whether they be moral or aesthetic. Each judgement would be purely a statement of personal preference, which could not then be contested in the way that we believe is possible and indeed seems meaningful. But if objectivism were true, then there would be values in a world even if it contained no minds, which is also hard to swallow. Could anything really matter in such a mindless universe? Would earthquakes or volcanoes be bad things if they affected no minded creature?

Objectivism and subjectivism both have their attractions but also their repulsions. A dispositional theory of value might bring us the best of both worlds. In such an account, value would be described as a mutual manifestation between perceivers and objects. The value does not belong to either the perceiver or the object exclusively but is produced by them jointly as a result of them coming together. This is to apply Martin's (2008: ch. 5) mutual manifestation framework for the manifestation of a disposition. Rather than dispositions being depicted as passive, standing in need of a stimulus in order to manifest, Martin models them as manifesting when they find the appropriate partner for their mutual manifestation. A soluble substance and a solvent such as water are mutual manifestation partners that can produce dissolving, for instance. Unlike the stimulus-response account, the mutual manifestation partners are of equal status: both active and genuinely productive of their effects. For a refined version of Martin's model, see Mumford and Anjum (forthcoming b).

Objectivism and subjectivism are both wrong, therefore, if value is a mutual manifestation between mind and world. The model suggests more or less equal partners productive of the phenomena. Hence it is not as if either the world or the perceiver is the sole originator of value. It could not occur without both. There has to be some feature of the world towards which perceivers are disposed to respond favourably (or unfavourably), valuing that feature positively or negatively. The world has a disposition to provoke that reaction and the perceiver needs a disposition to have the reaction. If we put them together, then we have the possibility of value. Empathy, discussed by Hume, could be one such sort of disposition that we have to respond in a certain way to situations that we apprehend.

We should also acknowledge, however, that human nature exhibits an array of variety. We don't all have the same dispositions to respond to the same worldly features in the same way. We thus differ in our aesthetic and moral tastes. If this purely were a subjective matter, it would be no use debating those tastes. But we are also talking about features of the world and what reactions they are disposed to prompt. In that context, there is nothing absurd in arguing with someone that they have atypical, uneducated, crude or even insanely skewed aesthetic or moral sensibilities. Meaningful disagreement is thus possible.

If something like this account is plausible, value could indeed be part of our natural world, therefore. It would of course be a part of the natural world that contained minded perceivers, with their dispositions to respond positively or negatively to the world and its events. But this would be enough to call the fact-value dichotomy seriously into question.

## 9. Coherence

We have presented a big picture. There are many stages at which our argument can be called into question and challenged on points of detail. We have tried to be open about where those points might be. The strength of the argument, we hope, is in the coherence of the whole picture.

We have argued that there is after all a close connection between dispositions and ethics that has largely been ignored. We have tried to explain how ethics, or at least a sizeable portion of it, is ultimately grounded in the dispositions of things, including the powers of people. And we argue that the existing separation of metaphysics from ethics is itself due to a metaphysical position, a Humean one which we think cannot be sustained. Some know this as Hume's fork but we have tried to distil its essence as a form of modal dualism. The error of such dualism is that it omits the dispositional modality and, as we have argued, this modality is the one that is crucial in understanding so many moral phenomena. And as it displays a modality that has a rightful place in the natural world, in causation, it could well be the vital clue that allows us to see how ethics could be naturalised.

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