

Wrights distinction
between judgement
independent
judgement dependent
properties ...



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Crispin Wright's (1988) theory of judgement dependence, also known as 'best opinion' account of moral property will form the basis of my essay. His concept can be explained in terms of a property such as colour; in that the truth of the colour is solely determined by the person's judgement of it. I will also look at shape and moral properties in a contrasting light to determine what makes either of these Judgement Dependent or Judgement Independent. Wright helps us to understand this with the criteria of his four conditions that will be mentioned in depth further on in the essay as discussed in 'Meaning and Intention' (2002). As we will see, these conditions hinge heavily on the determination of the properties, and require solid definitions of each in order to avoid error of judgement and our best opinion. I will then proceed to look at how moral properties can't be judgement dependent, which will be shown through the violation of some of Wright's four conditions. If moral properties were judgement dependent then it would mean that other properties such as shapes could be too, meaning the judgement dependence criteria is pressured into providing something else or another way around this issue. I show how Wright attempts to provide reasoning for why he believes a moral property can and cannot be judgement dependent; depending on the grammar of the moral discourse used and show how he does this using his four conditions.

Wright provides a distinction between judgement dependent and judgement independent properties using colours, shapes, intention and meaning as examples. (Miller/Wright, 2002). In order to do this we must look at a form of discourse, using a provisional equation:

So 'C' means the ideal C- conditions under which we form a best opinion judgement; that x is P, where 'P' means predicate and this provisional equation (PE) is judgement dependent if and only if (iff), the equation meets four conditions (Miller, 2003, 130). Before we look at what the four conditions are I must make it clear what the difference is between a judgement independent property and judgment dependent one. The former is when the subjects best opinions of the discourse plays an extension-reflecting role, which is where our best opinions reflect the independently determined extensions of P. Judgement dependence is when our best opinions instead determine the facts and play an extension determining role.

As discussed previously, the provisional equation must meet four conditions in order to be deemed judgment dependent. These are stated in Wright (2003, 132-133):

- i. A Prioricity condition: ' that we can construct a priori true provisional equations for such judgements. ' (A priori: facts already known before).
- ii. The Substantiality condition: ' that the C- conditions in these equations can be substantially specified...free of triviality associated with whatever it takes formulations.'
- iii. The Independence condition: '...satisfaction of the C- conditions is in any particular case, logically independent of the details of the extensions...'
- iv. The External condition: ' No other account is available of what else might determine the extension of the truth predicate.... of which the satisfaction by relevant provisional equations of conditions i-iii would be a consequence.'

So Wright uses colours to show a judgement dependent property, as he believes colour successfully fulfils the conditions mentioned, this is the provisional equation:

(PE) $(x \text{ is red}) \text{ C f } (\text{Subject S judges that } x \text{ is red iff } x \text{ is red})$

Following this, the subject must already know a priori of the colour red, and observe the colour through the ideal C – conditions, ‘ those which actually typically obtain at noon...’ (Miller/Wright, 2003, 16). These must also be of normal perceptual functions of a human being, which involves the subjects full attentiveness, no other cognitive dysfunction, no doubt of the conditions and therefore the subject will judge at his best opinion x is red. From the conditions mentioned, we can see that red satisfies all and therefore is Judgement Dependent.

Now I will present Judgment Independence in contrast to the above, using shape as an example with another provisional equation:

(PE) $(x \text{ is a square}) \text{ C f } (\text{Subject S judges that } x \text{ is a square iff } x \text{ is a square})$

Again the subject must know of a square and view the shape under the ideal C -conditions with normal perceptual functions. However, because squares are based upon angles, a number of extra observations are needed as it must be measured to fit the definition of a square so that when viewed no change takes place in the shapes size or length. This is a problem as it means an extra condition needs to be put in place, to include this extra observation and therefore this violates i. Since we cannot know a priori (already known facts) of the shape from our initial observation whether it is

actually a square or a trapezoid. So it fails to meet that condition and further to this, the independence condition, because there is no way to say how we can judge the shape with our best opinion without already assuming the shapes extensions. Therefore shapes cannot be judgement dependent.

So just as a square violated the independence condition because it requires us to presuppose facts about 'P' already, this same reason applies to moral properties such as 'culpably insensitive' (Miller, 2003, 135,).

An example moral property discourse is as follows:

(PE) (x) (C f Subject S judges that x is culpably insensitive iff x is culpably insensitive))

The C-conditions in this case are similar to colour and shape, in that they must be under normal perceptual function by the subject, 'no error concerning non-moral fact...S has no doubt about the satisfaction of any of these conditions' (Miller, 2003, 135). The independence condition as mentioned earlier, plays a big part in moral property discourse. Wright considers moral properties to not be judgement dependent as this condition is violated. The importance of the condition is that if the provisional equation has to presuppose any facts about the predicate, then our best opinions can't amount to the facts about the predicate. Since that would mean we are presupposing prior determination of the facts about P, which we thought were judged independently by our best opinion in the observation.

Wright rejects moral properties as judgement dependent because they are not judgement dependent in the same way that a colour is. This is down to

the fact that colour discourse is subjective and objective. Colour is subjective because it is only humans that determine the truth of the predicate under the C-conditions. Likewise, they are objective, because the facts of the C-conditions being obtained or not are objective facts themselves. However, moral properties are unable to be independent from individuals' moral opinions and therefore are not objective when observing the provisional equation above. Wright discusses this, '...the extension of the truth predicate among ascriptions of moral quality may not be thought of as determined by our best beliefs...' (Wright, 1988, 24). However, Wright attempts to salvage judgement dependence from moral properties by looking at a different example, using intentions:

(PE) $C \text{ f } ((\text{Subject } S \text{ judges that he intends to } \Phi) \text{ iff } (\text{he intends to } \Phi))$

In this equation Φ means an action that S intends to do, such as quit smoking. Here the C-conditions would involve the subject not being self-deceived, not lying, understanding what it is to have an intention, and being fully attentive to the intention he intends to do. Then in turn, as long as these conditions are included, the conditions i-iv would be satisfied and thus be, judgment dependent.

In contrast to this, Wright first argues against himself suggestion that just as with shape and moral properties, we can't say anything non-trivial about self-deception being a condition and therefore intentions would also violate the substantiality condition. He then tries to solve this with ' positive presumptiveness', ' this ensures that in all circumstances in which no one has no countervailing evidence one is a priori justified in holding that the no-

self deception condition is satisfied...(Miller, 2003, 137). It is a fundamental fact that we naturally assume people aren't self-deceived unless we have other reasons to believe so. Therefore self-deception can be taken out as a condition that will violate the substantiality condition.

However, we can't say that the equation is a priori true that S intends to quit smoking, rather it is 'a priori credible' and our best opinions, '...play a defeasible extension-determining role...' (Wright, 1988, 138), otherwise known as judgement dependent. So, as it satisfies the a priori condition, the relationship between our best opinions and the truth of intention, gives a defeasible extension-determining role and therefore satisfies because of the grammar of moral discourse.

In conclusion, the distinction between judgement dependent and judgement independent seems one which is suitable enough to understand, and makes sense as a whole applying it to various properties in order to determine what kind they are. Using the conditions as Wright clearly states, allows room to apply each one carefully and assess the property correctly and I believe it is a useful tool. I believe Wright makes a good attempt to salvage intention in moral discourse using the truth of intention and adding the self-deception C-condition as a way around this, which avoids the violation of the independence condition. As well as the fact that Wright shows how the grammar of the moral discourse means our best opinion plays a defeasible extension-determining role as stated above, and since our morals are determined independent of the best opinions then it allows it to be judgement dependent.

However, after evaluating his argument of moral properties and whether they can either be judgement dependent or independent, I have come to a conclusion that there seems to be a thin line between both and this poses a problem. Since it seems to be that the independence condition is the one that appears to be violated, both with moral discourse and shape, there needs to be a more distinct way of clearly defining how with shape and culpably insensitive examples it violates the condition but with 'intention' there is something there to salvage, and claim it could in fact be judgement dependent. If we make the mistake of allowing moral properties to be judgement dependent in the way that we have avoided the independence condition earlier, it would mean that the state of shapes would be open to interpretation again and scrutinized in the same manner, which could mean it too would be judgement dependent. This ultimately would go against every other argument Wright makes, leaving no room for a property to be plausibly viewed as judgement independent anymore and he would then have to give up his account of how we distinguish between judgement independence and judgement dependence altogether.