

Moral Values, Secondary Qualities, and Paint
Elijah Millgram¹

Among ethicists, nowadays,
There's a very popular view:
That values are like colors,
And a *should's* a sort of hue.
Just as being red is being such
As the normally sighted to move
To *see* red—so being good's
To dispose good men to approve.

Now, the 'red'-response, causally distant
From the colorful thing that it shows,
Can be changed in a way that's persistent.
One need but with paintbrush impose
A layer which covers the object
And changes the way it is seen;
Since the colors depend on responses,
The thing's red no longer but—green.

On the Lockean view we're discussing,
There's always a stretch in between
Thing seen and perceiver, along which
We can in this way intervene.
If values were second'ry qual'ties,
In principle anyone could
With a very high-tech form of paintbrush
Repaint evil deeds and men... *good*.

¹Philosophy Department, University of Utah, Salt Lake City UT 84112