

A CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY NONNATURALIST MORAL REALISM

By

Patrick Linden

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Abstract

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Adviser: Dr. Jesse Prinz

This dissertation defends the claim that nonnaturalist moral realism cannot be successfully formulated in terms of a constitution model similar to that proposed by non-reductive materialists for mental properties. Constitution metaphysics of moral properties fails to be non-reductive in any relevant sense; it is incompatible with the claim that moral properties are non-natural and it fails to provide any substance to the claim that there are objective values. Nonnatural moral properties are still in search of a believable metaphysics. The centerpiece of the dissertation is a detailed discussion of Shafer-Landau's metaphysics of moral properties as expressed in *Moral Realism*, since it is the most philosophically sophisticated proposal of a constitution model for moral properties. It will also be argued that nonnaturalist realism defended without a commitment to mind-independent moral properties fails to respond to common realist intuitions. In fact, the

strongest intuitions about objectivity are not likely to find a comprehensible metaphysics. It is unlikely that this result will have any important social consequences.

Dedicated to my dear parents.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Nonnaturalist Moral Realism

Like giving a colorblind person a scientific treatise on color perception won't convey to her what red looks like, no amount of scientific knowledge, it could seem, can tell us, how we *ought to* live. It is for example often held -and often denied- that pleasure is the sole intrinsic good, but what scientific evidence can establish this as a truth? Certainly pleasure is often pursued, but so are many other things, so this won't help us settle the issue. Arguably no similar natural fact will.

If science reveals no facts about what ought to be, then a choice seems to be forced upon us. Either we have to accept that there are no moral facts, or we have to suppose that there is a different point of view from where moral facts are visible. One such point of view could be our emotional engagement with the world. If we look at the world from the point of view of the detached moral scientist, or the sociopath, we see no values, but once we care about something, once we *want* something, and see the world through these states, we will "see" what ought to be. What ought to be is on this view "subjective" in the sense

that it is, in the end, dependent on what we care about. Since what we care about is a natural fact, this point of view is compatible with, and in principle explicable from a scientific point of view.

This subjectivist position is however unsatisfying to many philosophers who believe that it conflicts with our pre-theoretical understanding of moral facts. For example, while we may be happy to recognize a world of disgusting things, where this world is understood in the final analysis as a function of a disgusting-less reality and our response of disgust, moral facts seem independent of our individual or communal reactions to it. As Bertrand Russell once observed: "I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don't like it" (Russell, 1960). Indeed, these philosophers would pose the following teaser: is it not reasonable to suppose that wanton cruelty would be wrong in a possible world where we all *liked* it?

This brings us to the topic of this dissertation: nonnaturalist moral realism ("nonnaturalism" for short). This is a label for a variety of meta-ethical views, the very general features of which are, first, that there are objective moral facts dependent on, but not identical to any natural facts; second, that these facts are non-

empirically knowable through reason or moral intuition; and third, that they provide rational agents with reasons that are independent of their contingently given ends.¹ The

¹ Meta-ethical taxonomy is its own headache. I am not claiming that this is the only "right" definition of a nonnaturalist view. A more fine-grained understanding of "nonnaturalism" might be committed to the following seven proposition:

- (A) There are moral facts. (Metaphysical claim.)
- (B) Moral facts are in some sense independent of what we think they are. (Independence claim)
- (C) Moral judgments are beliefs about these facts. (Psychological claim.)
- (D) Moral language aims at describing these facts. (Linguistic/semantic claim.)
- (E) Some moral judgments and claims are true, and true because they correspond to the facts in some non-deflationary sense.
- (F) We know some of these truths. (Non-skeptical Epistemological claim.)
- (G) Moral properties determine categorical reasons, i.e. what we have reason to do regardless of what we want or what goals are realized or not by these reasons. (categoricity/rational authority claim)

This makes them paradigmatically/robustly realist. In addition they affirm the following three "nonnaturalist" propositions:

H) Metaphysical claim: There are moral properties, and these are not natural properties or reducible to such (or any other properties).

I) Methodological/epistemological claim: Moral inquiry and knowledge is different and autonomous from that of the natural and the social sciences.

J) Semantic Claim: Moral language describe moral facts and cannot be translated into any other language without loss of essential meaning.

Why break the view in to 10 elements? Because these elements can, and have been, separated, selected and combined in various ways forming "hybrid views" like for example: Realist Expressivism (Copp 2001, Brown 2007),

nonnaturalist considers the failure of science to reveal what ought to be, as a limitation of this perspective, rather than as a reason to give up non-subjective moral facts. We know, argues the nonnaturalist, that there is objective good and evil, right and wrong, and if these properties are not natural, then they are nonnatural, and if they are not graspable from a natural point of view, then they are so from another, non-natural point of view. According to the nonnaturalist this moral point of view discovers and responds to, rather than creates moral reality. Moral thought is *sui generis*, but, argues the nonnaturalist, it is not *strange*, since we are all personally familiar with it. It's where we go when we deliberate about what is of value and about what we ought to do. It is from this, and no other, point of view that we can *discover* the truth about whether pleasure is the sole intrinsic good, and whether wanton cruelty is wrong.

This essay is concerned with nonnaturalist realism understood narrowly as the view that moral judgments are

Ecumenical Expressivism (Ridge 2006), and Expressive-Assertivism (Boisvert 2008) and so on. David Copp, "Realist-Expressivism: A Neglected Option for Moral Realism." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18 (2001): 1-43; Michael Ridge, "Ecumenical Expressivism: Finessing Frege." *Ethics* 116 (2006): The Best of Both Worlds?" *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 2 (2007): 51-76.

made true by the instantiation of moral properties. This means that Kant's view, although objectivist and nonnaturalist, is not here considered as a form of nonnaturalist realism. For Kantians moral reality is a function of what we can rationally will, whereas the nonnaturalist realist believes that moral reality is not a function of the Will, whether man's or God's.

Before describing my thesis and how I will argue chapter by chapter (1.5), let me set the stage with a few words about the history of the view (1.2), its challenges (1.3), and its recent resurgence (1.4).

1.2. A brief history of Nonnaturalism

Nonnaturalist realism is arguably as old as philosophical ethics itself. The pre-philosophical understanding of morality is in terms of rules dictated by the Heavens. The Greeks told the story of how Zeus gave man the laws so that they would have an advantage over the wild animals. This type of account is quite clear on the face of it: something is right if it is commanded or loved by God/the gods. Plato, in the voice of Socrates, challenged this picture by asking: is something right because it is loved by the gods, or is it loved by the gods because it is right? If we take the first option, then the

gods would have no grounds for loving something rather than its opposite and justice would be entirely arbitrary. We must therefore, Plato argued, rather assume that things are just and good, prior to and logically independent of the gods' love for it. That the gods love it/command it is an attribute of justice, not its essence. Throughout his dialogues Plato rejects the views that morality is simply an instrument of power, or a compromise, or a social contract, or entirely subjective, or foolishness. There is, he suggests, a transcendent and unchanging form, or universal "the Good" and our lives are well lived in so far as they resembles this Form. In *Parmenides* Plato writes,

There are certain ideas of which all other things partake, and from which they derive their names; that similars, for example, become similar, because they partake in similarity; and great things become great, because they partake in greatness; and that just and beautiful things become just and beautiful, because they partake of justice and beauty.

This is a realist view since whether an act partakes in the universal Justice is an objective fact. Knowledge of the form is innate and has its origin in a previous life. Plato's view is the first and the most important paradigm of nonnaturalist realism.

The history of nonnaturalist moral realism contains a wealth of thinkers. In the seventeenth century there were the Cambridge Platonists and other so called "British

rationalists".² Ralph Cudworth, representative of this tradition, reacted, as they all did, against Thomas Hobbes' subjectivist view that "whatsoever is the object of any man's desire, that is what he for his part calleth good, and the object of his aversion, evil" (Hobbes, 1651/2010). No action, according to Hobbes, is right or wrong in itself but only so relative to the edicts of the sovereign. In his *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (1731/1991) Cudworth argued against Hobbes that "moral good and evil, just and unjust, honest and dishonest... cannot possibly be arbitrary things, made by will... because it is universally true that things are what they are, not by will but by nature" (p. 120). Cudworth proposed that moral principles "are eternal and self-subsistent things". We have, he thought, non-empirical knowledge of these principles since our mind, as the world at large, is a copy of, or realization of, God's mind. Another important example of nonnaturalism can be found in Samuel Clarke's

² Other Cambridge Platonists were Henry More (1614-1687) and Ralph Cudworth (1617-1689), both fellows of Christ's College, Cambridge. The group also included Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), Peter Sterry (1613-1672), John Smith (1618-1652), Nathaniel Culverwell (1619-1651), John Worthington (1618-1671), all one-time fellows of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Their younger followers included George Rust (d. 1670), Anne Conway (1630-1679) and John Norris (1657-1711). Sarah Hutton, "The Cambridge Platonists", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Jan 2007.

work. In a *Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion* (1705/1991) Clarke argued that,

There is... such a thing as fitness and unfitness, eternally, necessarily, and unchangeably in the Nature and Reason of things. Now what these relations of things absolutely and necessarily are in themselves that also they appear to be to the understanding of all intelligent beings, except those only who understand things to be what they are not, that is, those whose understanding are either very imperfect or very much depraved... (p. 192)

The existence of these relations of "fitness", Clarke proposed, is "as plain as that there is such a thing as proportion or disproportion in geometry and arithmetic" (p. 46) and they "direct" the actions of all rational creatures. Clarke writes,

These eternal and necessary differences of things makes it reasonable for creatures so to act; they cause it to be their duty, or lay obligation upon them so to do... even separate from the consideration of these rules being the positive will and command of God, and even antecedent to any respect of regard, expectation or apprehension, of any particular private and personal advantage or disadvantage, reward or punishment, either present or future... (p. 192)

The idea that moral obligations are unconditionally and universally binding on a rational being is, since Kant, called the "categoricity" of moral reasons/commands.

In the early 20th century G.E. Moore (1903), whose name is probably the first to be associated with nonnaturalism today, argued that any definition of the moral and in

particular intrinsic goodness in non-moral terms is doomed to failure and constitutes a "naturalistic fallacy". The conclusion was reached by means of his Open Question Argument pointing out that for any proposed definition D of goodness, it is always possible to ask without contradiction: is D good? If, for example, it is suggested that good means pleasure, then it would be contradictory to deny that pleasure is good. It would be to say that pleasure was not pleasure. He took this argument to demonstrate that goodness could not be equivalent to any other property: goodness is simple and unanalyzable. The goodness of a state of affairs is determined by natural properties, but goodness itself is not a natural property. Echoing Cudworth, echoing Plato, he insisted that it is what it is, and nothing else. Moore discovered from his distinct moral point of view that it is self-evident that pleasure, beauty, the appreciation of beauty, and friendship, are intrinsically good. He also found it self-evident that the right act, the act we ought to do, is the act that brings about the most good.³

³ As argued recently by Thomas Hurka (2003) Moore, rather than being seen as strikingly new and outstanding, is better understood as occupying a middle position (together with Hasting Rashdall) between the earlier theories of Sidgwick, Franz Brentano, J.M.E. McTaggart and later formulations by H.A. Prichard, W.D. Ross and C.D. Broad.

A particularly noteworthy representative of nonnaturalist realism between Moore and the present day is Sir David Ross. Ross argued against Moore's and Sidgwick's consequentialism that there is not one good like Sidgwick's pleasure, or a couple of goods like Moore's pleasure, beauty and friendship, determining our duties according to the imperative "bring about as much of the good stuff as possible!" but rather many good things, and many obligations existing independently of their role in producing good. Our knowledge of these come, in classical nonnaturalist fashion, from a rational recognition of their self-evidence. Ross (1930) wrote

(t)hat an act, *qua* fulfilling a promise, or *qua* effecting a just distribution of good ... is *prima facie* right, is self-evident; not in the sense that it is evident from the beginning of our lives, or as soon as we attend to the proposition for the first time, but in the sense that when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of

Henry Sidgwick *Methods of Ethics* (1874), Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil* (1907), Franz Brentano, *Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* (1889) and J.M.E. McTaggart *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, Routledge 1969. Moore was clearly influenced by his teacher Henry Sidgwick who argued in *Methods of Ethics* that "the fundamental notion represented by the word "ought" or "right" is essentially different from all notions of representing facts of physical or psychical experience." (*Methods of Ethics*, 7th Ed., p. 25); that moral notions are "too elementary to admit of any formal definition." (p. 32) and that we know moral truths *a priori* where some moral propositions are as clear and certain as "any axiom in Arithmetic or Geometry".

proof, or of evidence beyond itself. It is self-evident just as a mathematical axiom, or the validity of a form of inference is self-evident. The moral order expressed in these propositions is just as much part of the fundamental nature of the universe (and, we may add, of any possible universe in which there were moral agents at all) as is the spatial or numerical structure expressed in the axioms of geometry or arithmetic. In our confidence that these propositions are true there is involved the same trust in our reason that is involved in our confidence in mathematics; and we should have no justification for trusting it in the latter sphere and distrusting it in the former. (1930, pp. 29-30)

The plurality of goods and duties means that there is the potential for conflicts amongst them, and only life experience and practical wisdom can tell us what the right action is.

This was a brief history of moral nonnaturalism and some of its chief proponents. Before considering contemporary nonnaturalism, let me say a few words about why the view fell out of favor, and about the considerations inspiring writers such as Shafer-Landau to defend it.

1.3. Nonnaturalism in Trouble

While Moore's *Principia Ethica* is often credited with setting the stage for 20th century ethics, and while his open question argument initially and temporarily halted ethical naturalism, Moore's positive view that there are *sui generis* objective moral properties and non-empirical knowledge thereof, was, with some important exceptions, largely rejected.

Moral realists have always been pressed for an explanation of their posited objective moral properties/eternal and immutable fitnesses/transcendent principles: what is the relation of these to natural facts? How do they give us categorical reasons? How can we know them? And what explains their intimate connection to our desires and emotions? The philosophical climate of the 20th century made it particularly hard to answer these questions. Indeed, the century can be fairly described as hostile to moral realism and nonnaturalism. Three major sources of this hostility were: (a) the immense progress and success of science, and the decline of religion, both of which contributed to a suspicion towards realities not empirically confirmable; (b) the increasing globalization with its attendant discovery of the plurality of moralities questioned the idea of universal moral truths; (c) The two

world wars further undermined the belief in morality as truths of reason graspable by all rational creatures. These three historical facts were reflected in academia. In the Western universities the most influential movements of thought were arguably positivism, pragmatism and post-modernism, none of which were hospitable to realism and in particular not *nonnaturalist* realism. Echoing Hume's distinction between matters of fact and relations of ideas ("Humes fork"), the positivists divided the world of knowledge in to the synthetic and the analytic. Moral beliefs, they thought, fell in to neither category, and, therefore were not subjects of knowledge, but were rather "non-cognitive pseudo-beliefs". "Sentences which express moral judgements" A.J Ayer wrote in *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936/1946) "do not say anything. They are pure expressions of feeling..." (p. 161). The post-positivist pragmatist Willard Van Orman Quine (1951) rejected the sharp dichotomy between the analytic (what depends on language) and the synthetic (what depends on the world) and he rejected the distinction between the *a priori* (what we know independent of experience) and the *a posteriori* (what we know dependent on experiences). This rejection did nothing to further the cause of moral realism. On Quine's view, since there is no *a priori* knowledge, there cannot be

a *a priori* synthetic moral knowledge. Nothing is self-evident, everything is open for revision. Even the "immutable" truths of geometry that so often serve as the realist's model for moral truth are revisable. The rejection of the *a priori* was also a rejection of ontology as normally understood. There is "no first philosophy", Quine proclaimed, no transcendent point from where we can decide what is real and what is not. The best judge of what there is, is science, and by that he means the most basic theoretical physics. The resulting ontology is as stark as a desert landscape.

Neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty (1989) in similar spirit attacked the very notion of truth as representation of "reality". He recommends that we take an ironic stance to all "vocabularies" scientific as well as moral. "Ironists" Rorty wrote, "see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor as attempts to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off the old" (p. 73). The attack on truth and objectivity reaches its apotheosis in postmodernism, where these notions are seen as myths constructed by the elite -old white men- to oppress women and minorities. There is according to the post-modernist no world-view or way of life that is more true or reasonable

than another. So much for an "immutable" moral reality discoverable by Reason. Jean Paul Sartre's (1946) radical subjectivism according to which life is a kind of non-representational piece of art seems like a fitting ethos against this background.

1.4. Hope for Nonnaturalist Realism

The view that natural science is the last word on what there is and the view that truth and objectivity are the same as usefulness or just a myth, exclude the possibility of nonnaturalist realism. But, of course, not everyone agreed with the anti-metaphysics of the new empiricists/pragmatists, and the relativism of post-modernism. There were always those who resisted anti-metaphysical and anti-realist trends, and this resistance grew in popularity the last part of the century. A recent survey by *philpapers* suggests that the climate has improved for the moral nonnaturalist.⁴ The survey shows that while 50.8% of the test-takers accepted or leaned towards metaphysical naturalism and 56% accepted or leaned

⁴ The *PhilPapers* Survey was a survey of professional philosophers and others on their philosophical views, carried out in November 2009. The Survey was taken by 3226 respondents, including 1803 philosophy faculty members and/or PhDs and 829 philosophy graduate students. I thank Jesse Prinz for bringing this study to my attention.

towards physicalism, a full 71.1% accepted or leaned towards the possibility of a *a priori* knowledge, 65.7% accepted or leaned towards moral cognitivism and 56.3% accept or leaned towards moral realism. These numbers suggest that moral nonnaturalism is still on the table. Indeed it is defended in different versions and with more or less conviction by important thinkers like Thomas Nagel (1997), Ronald Dworkin (2006), Derrek Parfit (2006), John McDowell (1998), David McNaughton (1988), William FitzPatrick (2008), Terence Cuneo (2007), Jean Hampton (1998) and Russ Shafer-Landau (2003).

What occasions this continued interest in moral nonnaturalism? There is rarely if ever a completely rational explanation for trends in philosophy. One reason is certainly that positivism, pragmatism and postmodernism, while held by some of the best and the brightest, are all too extreme. Postmodernism for starters is arguably preposterous, incoherent and evil. Preposterous because it says that our acceptance of scientific theories like for example Crick's and Watson's model of DNA is largely "political", self-contradictory because it holds as a truth that there is none, and evil because it recommends an ironic stance vis-a-vis the unspeakable horrors of the world - there are according to this view no facts in

history, implying that the holocaust is real in so far as this is a useful story and holocaust is "evil" because the Nazis lost the war. According to some commentators, positivism and scientific pragmatism in their turn go too far in rejecting anything which is not accessible from the scientific point of view or "reducible" without remainders to that which is. It goes too far when it leads thinkers to for example consider the difficulties of reducing the mental to the physical a reason for denying that there are thoughts, beliefs, and qualitative experiences. "To Quine" has become a verb in Daniel Dennet's humorous *Philosophical Lexicon* (2008) meaning, "to deny resolutely the existence or importance of something real or significant."

Against eliminativist or radical reductivism some philosophers argue in favor of an ontological and theoretical pluralism. Thomas Nagel (1974) famously claims that there are facts about what it is like -from the inside- to be conscious, which are left out by the third-person perspective of objective science.⁵ We won't know

⁵ Frank Jackson (1986) argues similarly that if we have never experienced red, then no amount of physical facts can tell us what red looks like, concluding that there are subjectively accessible non-physical facts. This argument was alluded to in the beginning of the introduction since it is analogous to an argument for nonnaturalism: We know that it is wrong to boil babies. This knowledge is not natural/scientific, so there are non-natural/non-scientific

what it is like to be a bat, regardless of how much physical data we collect about bats. To eliminate what cannot be seen when taking "the view from nowhere" results in blindness, an impoverished understanding of what there is. We must, Nagel argues, accept mental properties alongside physical properties without one (the mental) "reducing" to the other. Others have argued in favor of "anti-reductionism" not only concerning the mental, but also for biological, mental, sociological, economic and other "special science" facts. The claim is that these sciences deal with facts and properties not "accessible" from the perspective of physics. The result of/content of anti-reductivism is a liberal view of the autonomy of different sciences/"languages" and a corresponding ontological pluralism with regards to properties.

It is the hope of some nonnaturalist moral realists that this liberalism can extend to include moral properties. They hope to show that if we accept that there are irreducible mental properties, biological properties and economical properties, only a bias against moral realism can justify a rejection of irreducible *moral* properties. This dissertation is a critical examination of

moral facts.

the non-reductive strategy applied to moral properties. Since Shafer-Landau's *Moral Realism* is the most comprehensive and detailed explication of the analogy between nonreductive special science properties (in particular mental properties) and moral properties, his view will serve as representative.

1.5 Overview of the Thesis

In Chapter 2 Shafer-Landau's non-naturalism is expounded and compared to other important ethical theories operating within a broadly naturalist worldview. A *prima facie* case for nonnaturalism will be made by pointing out the difficulties these views have overcoming Hume's fact-value gap. If we reject skepticism, then, in order for there to be objective facts about how we ought to live, there must be facts about which kind of response to natural facts is justified or merited by these facts. This does not itself seem to be a natural-scientific fact.

Chapter 3 discusses moral supervenience and in particular Simon Blackburn's supervenience argument against moral realism. It will be argued that Shafer-Landau's constitution view of moral properties might imply moral supervenience, but only if realization is understood reductively. Thus understood realization is not the right

model for nonnatural properties. Shafer-Landau must therefore hold that realization is not reductive, and accept that nonnaturalism has no explanation of moral supervenience. This is the nonnaturalists' standard view: there is no explanation of the relationship between the moral and the non-moral. It is what it is. The chapter thus ends with an agreement between Blackburn and Shafer-Landau concerning the nonnaturalist realist's inability to explain the nature of moral supervenience.

In chapter 4 it will be argued that the arguments for the irreducibility of supervenient properties assume a flawed understanding of reduction. Multiple realization, Shafer-Landau's main argument against reduction, is compatible with reduction in its more interesting and intuitive sense. On the other hand, constitution or realization is *sufficient* for reduction. Shafer-Landau therefore cannot gain anything by comparing nonnatural properties to constitution views of mental properties. In fact, this understanding seems to threaten the integrity of his position.

Chapter 5 discusses Gilbert Harman's causal exclusion argument. The problem for Shafer-Landau here is that while his constitution view explains the causal relevance of moral properties, this would also make them natural

according to his own definition. In tension with his constitution story, he therefore sticks to the traditional nonnaturalist view that moral properties have no causal powers. At this point the constitution account seems to be largely abandoned. The question then becomes why we would have to assume the existence of moral properties in order to fully explain ethics. It is argued that while a comparison to our non-causal knowledge of *qualia* and mathematics might show us that a lack of causal powers does not mean non-existence, it amounts to nothing in terms of an elucidation of moral properties, and therefore poses no credible threat to empirical meta-ethics.

Chapter 6 investigates Shafer-Landau's strategy of comparing moral properties to, in particular, *qualia*. It is argued that such a comparison is unilluminating. This is not surprising since the relationship between the brain and *qualia* is known as the Hard Problem. This is where we part ways with Shafer-Landau's particular realist strategy.

In chapter 7 we will consider McDowell's and Dworkin's nonnaturalist realist views. These views are distancing themselves from the claim that moral properties are mind-independent. It will be argued that neither McDowell nor Dworkin lives up to their realist rhetoric. They fail to show how moral judgments are underwritten in a

way that excludes relativism.

In the final chapter 8 we will consider the argument that moral realism is a morally better theory than moral anti-realism. It will be argued that this argument fails because it is unclear what the effects of people's beliefs about their moral beliefs are.

Chapter 2

Shafer-Landau's Non-Naturalist Realism in Context

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide the necessary background and explanation of Shafer-Landau's Non-Naturalist Realism in the context of alternate naturalist and non-naturalist theories. This chapter is divided into three parts, the first of which is to define Shafer-Landau's theory; the second, to explain what motivates it; and third, to present his rejection of common alternate theories. I will establish that there is a *prima facie* case for non-naturalist realism, before turning to a critical exploration in following chapters.

1. Shafer-Landau's Theory Expounded

In the opening chapter of *Moral Realism*, Shafer-Landau (2003) describes a familiar broadly naturalistic understanding of reality according to which "(t)here is the familiar world that science speaks of. And there is us, responding to that world. And that is it" (p. 12). Meta-ethical theories operating within this framework hold that:

There is no world of moral facts against which the truth of a moral judgment can be checked. There are no moral properties whose instantiation can determine the

moral qualities of persons, traits, actions, practices, or institutions. (p. 12)

Shafer-Landau argues that this naturalist picture is false. A true understanding of morality must, he believes, assume that in addition to "our familiar world of science" there "is a moral reality that people are trying to represent when they issue judgments about what is right and wrong" (p. 12). Moral language according to Shafer-Landau appears to be fact stating, because it *is* fact stating. And there actually are moral facts. He writes:

There are moral truths that obtain independently of any preferred perspective, in the sense that the moral standards that fix the moral facts are not made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given actual or hypothetical perspective. (p. 12)

Shafer-Landau thus presents a traditional non-naturalist moral realist ("nonnaturalist" for short) theory. It is *cognitivist*, claiming that "that moral claims are truth evaluable and can serve as the content of beliefs, and are potentially objects of knowledge" (p. 263). And it is a strongly objectivist form of cognitivism in that it excludes views of moral truth as fixed by agreements under ideal conditions, so-called "constructivism." Shafer-Landau sees moral truth as something for us to *discover*, not to

make:

[M]oral principles and facts are objective in quite a strong sense: they are true and exist independently of what any human being, no matter his or her perspective, thinks of them. (p. 8)

By "principles" Shafer-Landau is not referring to the diverse collection of general moral beliefs people hold. Rather, they are certain law-like relationships between non-moral properties and moral properties. The law-like relationships constitute in this sense objective moral principles, which our man-made principles aim at representing. Like the most fundamental principles of physics, they admit of no explanation. They just are. "The realist" Shafer-Landau explains "must say of the moral standards that she favors that they just are correct -not in virtue of their being selected or created by anyone, but simply correct" (p. 4).

The moral properties distributed in this law-like pattern are not natural properties. By "natural properties" Shafer-Landau means those properties "that would figure ineliminably in perfected versions of the natural and social sciences" (p. 252). Something is a science if it proceeds like our sciences proceed, namely by discovering its most fundamental truths empirically, *a posteriori*.

Ethics is not a science because it discovers its fundamental truths *a priori*.

No amount of scientific research can by itself identify moral facts. A comprehensive scientific world-view will therefore be incomplete. But, Shafer-Landau argues, that science cannot discover moral facts, does not mean that they are not real:

There are genuine features of the world that remain forever outside the purview of the natural sciences. Moral facts are such features. They introduce an element of normativity that cannot be captured by the natural sciences. They tell us what we ought to do; how we should behave; what is worth pursuing; what reasons we have; what is justifiable and what not. There is no science that can inform us of such things. (2003, p. 4)

To illustrate, it is an empirically measurable fact, at least in principle, that some particular action promotes an individual's pleasure. It is not however, Shafer-Landau argues, a *scientific* fact that the individual therefore *ought* to pursue this action, nor is it a scientifically ascertainable fact that said individual ought to pursue pleasure in general.

A further difference between moral properties and natural properties is that scientific properties are referred to in causal explanation and prediction, whereas ethical properties are primarily action guiding. Shafer-

Landau argues that moral properties provide us with categorical reasons to act as they direct. Categorical reasons are reasons that apply to us whether or not we have any pre-existing interest in acting on them. If, for example, someone has a duty to help his ailing mother, then this is sufficient for there to be a reason for him to help her whether or not he wants to, or whether or not helping her serves his self-interest.

Shafer-Landau also holds the moral rationalist view that moral beliefs can motivate an agent to act by themselves. That is to say: it is sufficient to believe that you have a duty to help your ailing mother for you to form the desire to do so. This view is known as externalism about reasons and it opposes the internalist, or Humean idea that beliefs can only lead to action if they connect with some relevant pre-existing desire. Shafer-Landau does however not believe that moral beliefs do necessarily motivate "since their motivational force can be entirely extinguished by various defeaters" (p. 266).

Although not scientific/natural, moral properties and facts are dependent on non-moral properties. How things stand non-morally - "descriptively" - determines how things stand morally. If two worlds are identical in terms of their non-moral properties, then they will be identical in

terms of their moral properties. This relationship is known as "supervenience." Claims of supervenience relations naturally invite the question of why/how it is that they hold. Shafer-Landau explains supervenience in terms of realization.⁶ "Moral facts" he explains "necessarily covary with descriptive ones because moral properties are always realized exclusively by descriptive ones" (p. 77).

This kind of relationship between properties is according to Shafer-Landau quite common. For example, it is held by many that mental properties are not reducible to physical properties. Shafer-Landau believes that the relationship between the mental and the physical as conceived by non-reductive views provides an enlightening model of the relationship between moral and non-moral properties. We should, he argues, be skeptical about neither.

We can have knowledge of the law-like relationships between moral and descriptive properties because some moral principles are self-evident. Shafer-Landau defines self-evidence in the following way:

A proposition P is self-evident = df. P is such that

⁶ Sometimes he explains it in terms of constitution. I believe that he regards these terms as synonymous. In *Precis*, he writes that "moral features of something are wholly constituted by, but not identical to, the natural features on which they supervene." (ibid 265)

adequately understanding and attentively considering just p is sufficient to justifying believing that p .

The following beliefs held by Shafer-Landau provide him with evidence for the existence of self-evident beliefs:

It seems to be self-evident that, other things being equal, it is wrong to take pleasure in another's pain, to taunt and threaten the vulnerable, to prosecute and punish those who are innocent, and to sell another's secrets solely for personal gain. (p. 248)

Most moral propositions, however, are not self-evident. For example, "all things considered" propositions are not self-evident. How to weigh the different moral and non-moral considerations must therefore have a different epistemology. Shafer-Landau proposes a reliabilist model. Reliabilism claims that a belief is justified if it is produced in a generally reliable way. To illustrate: if your mother told you not to steal, and this turned out to be right, then if she tells you not to lie, you are justified in believing that you should not lie. This is all I will say about epistemology, since the question of this essay is not how we come to know moral truths, but rather whether the nonnaturalist realist can give a persuasive account of objective moral properties.

To sum up Shafer-Landau's view in meta-ethical idiolect:

it is cognitivist because it regards moral judgments as a) truth-evaluable b) representational states. It is descriptivist because it believes that moral language essentially aims at representing moral facts. It is realist in a particularly strong sense, because it believes that the moral reality that these beliefs aim at representing exists no matter what anyone anywhere thinks, in short, it is mind-independent. It only allows for minds to enter as *objects* of moral appraisals. That is, without minds there would be no moral properties instantiated. But this would not in any way challenge or change the content of moral principles.⁷ His realism, in short, is metaphysical. It is non-naturalist because the role of moral properties and facts is not in first hand causal explanation and prediction, but rather in the guidance of action, and, importantly, they are not discoverable through scientific-empirical methods or reducible to properties and facts which are. It is externalist in that it believes that moral

⁷ I.e. even without any bad intentions, bad intentions would still be bad, no less so than the fact that oil is thicker than water would be challenged by the depletion of all oil reserves. His view accepts that mental facts such as intentions can determine moral properties. But they do so, regardless of views about which such moral properties are instantiated by which mental state. E.g. Bill's if intention to harm Jill, realized evil, then it does so whatever either Jill or Bill or anyone thinks about it.

properties constitute categorical requirements - requirements applicable to agents regardless of their interests, and it is rationalist because it holds that the belief that there is such a requirement can be sufficient to motivate an agent as they direct. Finally it is intuitionist or rationalist because it believes that some moral principles are knowable *a priori*.

Let us apply Shafer-Landau's theory to a particular case:

"Mary believes that knowledge is an intrinsic good." Mary's belief according to the theory, is the belief that knowledge is to be pursued for its own sake, and this belief is true if knowledge is such that, by its very nature, it is to be pursued for its own sake. That it has this "to-be-pursuedness" is a fundamental fact about how things stand. When Mary believes that knowledge has this property, her belief may bring about in her the desire to pursue knowledge. (She might also lack any desire to pursue knowledge.) If she tells someone that she thinks that knowledge is an intrinsic good, her words aim at communicating this fact about knowledge. If someone would contradict her, claiming that knowledge is not to be pursued for its own sake, they would be right if indeed knowledge is not to be pursued for its own sake ("lack the

property of to-be-pursuedness"). Otherwise, they would be wrong.

2.2 The Prima Facie Case for Non-Reductive Naturalism

Shafer-Landau's theory is in many ways a typical nonnaturalist realist position: it is a "paradigmatic realism" or a "robust realism" similar to the earlier theories of Cudworth, Clarke, Sidgwick, Moore and Ross. In what follows I will describe the *prima facie* argument for robust realism from moral phenomenology and the considerations for thinking that realism should be non-naturalist.

2.2.1 Commonsense Realism/Objectivism

The realist believes that a theory of ethics should start by carefully considering how morality seems to us. This careful consideration has traditionally been carried out inside the head of the philosopher something like the following way:

The realist philosopher (R) meets the common man (C) (both parts played by the philosopher).

R - Do you believe that it is wrong to kick babies for fun?

C - Of course I do.

R - Do you think that it is wrong *because* you think so?

C - Obviously not.

R - Do you think that it is wrong because someone else, or society thinks so?

C - No.

R - Do you think that it would be ok if some person or society thought so?

C - No.

According to the realist philosopher these answers commit us to the view that moral judgments are

- a) beliefs,
- b) aiming at representing moral facts,
- c) which are not dependent on what we think they are,
- d) and whose instantiation gives us reason to act as they direct,
- e) independently of what we happen to want.

In short, moral common-sense commits us, according to the realist, to a "commonsense realism" or "folk-realism".⁸

⁸ To employ technical terms; moral truth according to commonsense realism is:

- a) *Mind-independent*, meaning that it is not dependent on what we think it is. The evil of kicking babies would not turn good, because we thought so.
- b) *Normative/prescriptive*, meaning that it gives us reason to act "as it directs". The wrongness of kicking babies is a reason not to kick them.

As we have seen, Shafer-Landau believes that our commonsense realism has got it completely right. His theory therefore achieves, or at least aims at achieving, *perfect* "internal accommodation": meaning that it requires no revision of our moral commonsense. Our belief that it is wrong to kick babies for fun is true, and it is so because it really *is* wrong to kick babies for fun "independently of what any human being, no matter his or her perspective, thinks of them" (2003, p. 8). Shafer-Landau believes that our moral phenomenology is committed to the highest degree of mind-independence of moral principles. Moral truth, in his picture, is as independent from what we think it to be, as for example, the truths about the principles governing celestial bodies - they are what they are, whether we are there to know them or not: they are transcendent.⁹ It is Shafer-Landau's contention that anything less than

c) *Categorical*, meaning that moral reasons apply to us whether we want it or not. The wish to kick babies, or the interests served by kicking babies, cannot make it right.

⁹ Moral judgments on this picture are like Locke's view of judgments about primary properties. They are made true by the mind accurately re-presenting these properties, where the mind is seen as playing no part in constituting them. There are obvious disanalogies here: generalizations concerning primary properties are arrived at inductively, whereas as generalizations concerning moral properties are supposed by Shafer-Landau to be knowable *a priori*. Nevertheless, it is a useful image since it gives us a paradigm of strong mind-independence.

transcendental realism gives the lie to our moral experience.

Only cognitivism straightforwardly preserves ordinary talk of truth... When we experience moral perplexity, we often see ourselves as engaged in a search for the truth about who is in the right, or where our obligations lie. We can well explain the point and persistence of moral disagreement by attributing to agents the presupposition that there is a right answer awaiting discovery.

In what follows I will show that there are *prima facie* reasons for agreeing with Shafer-Landau that his robust "metaphysical" moral realism is more true to objectivist intuitions than are competing alternatives. But first, since so much is made of realism's match with commonsense, let us briefly consider some recent argument against this common assumption.

2.2.2 Questioning Moral Commonsense Objectivism

Moral realism is traditionally thought to capture moral commonsense, but is commonsense really committed to objectivism? As it turns out the truth is complex. Studies show that children are aware of a distinction between conventional rules and moral rules (Nucci, 2001; Flanagan, 1991). When, for example, asked if it would still be wrong to pull someone's hair if the teacher said that it was ok, most children answer "Yes". When asked if it would be wrong

to speak out of turn if the teacher allowed it, most children answer "No". Larry Nucci (2001) who conducted one of these studies takes this to mean that, "preschool-aged children understand that it is objectively wrong to hurt others" (p. 86). A study by Shaun Nichols & Trisha Folds-Bennet (2003) shows that children are more likely to regard properties such as icky, yummy and fun as dependent on our responses than moral notions of good and bad, thus further supporting the view that children are objectivists. It has also been shown that children tend to maintain that moral violations are wrong in other countries, but they are less likely to maintain that conventional violations are wrong in other countries (Smetana, 1993). Or, as a final example, take a recent study by G.P. Goodwin and J.M. Darley (2008) where subjects are asked whether certain behaviors are right or wrong. After collecting the answers, the participants are told that there had been disagreement about how to describe the actions and they are asked if they think that disagreeing participants both could be right, or only one of them. The result of this study was that 70% of the participants thought that only one could be right. This supports the idea that most participants were objectivists.

However, there is also evidence against the idea of

commonsense objectivism. First of all the above studies suffer some methodological problems. Take the just mentioned study by Goodwin & Darley. Sarkissian, Knobe & Park (2009) point out that it fails to register cultural relativism, because the subjects are to imagine two persons having an intra-cultural disagreement. In order to see what the responses would be in an imagined case of inter-cultural disagreement, Sarkissian et al. asked 223 undergraduate students taking philosophy at Baruch College to consider the following sentence:

S Horace finds his youngest child extremely unattractive and therefore kills him

They are asked to imagine that someone in their college, Sam, finds S morally permissible, but that one of their classmates finds it impermissible. They are subsequently instructed to answer whether they agree, or disagree (on scale of 1-7 where 4 = unsure) with the following statement:

P Since your classmate and Sam have different judgments about the case at least one of them must be wrong.

They are then asked the same questions, but now "Sam" is replaced with "a Mamilon warrior" from an "isolated tribe". The results: In the case of Sam the average was 5.43 and in the case of the Warrior, the average was 4.33.

That is, the tendency was to agree with P in the intra-cultural case, and to be unsure about what to think in the inter-cultural case.

Numerous other studies have a similar result. Consider a study by Kelly et al. (2007, from Prinz, 2007) where subjects are inclined to judge that it would be wrong for a sea-captain to whip a drunken sailor in our culture, but right in another where this is a normal practice. Or take a study by Shaun Nichols (2004) where subjects are asked to consider a case where John and Fred who come from different cultures disagree about whether it is ok to hit an innocent person if you feel like it. Seventeen of 40 subjects responded that there is no fact of the matter here, and that it all depends on the rules of their respective societies. What seems to be emerging is a more complex picture than the standard commonsense objectivist assumption. The common moralizer may, but does not necessarily, presuppose objectivism.¹⁰

What does this mean for moral theory? It weakens an important argument for moral realism. If our moral

¹⁰ This is after 6 global skeptics -students denying that there is a fact about the roundness of the earth- were excluded from the sample. The real number of non-objectivists would be 23 of 40 were these arguably confused individuals included.

commonsense contains both objectivist and relativist elements, then realism cannot claim to be the only view matching our commonsense. Relativists can be seen as actually validating some moral commonsense beliefs. -We think that some moral judgments are relative, and they actually are. This obviously falls way short of a refutation of moral realism. It could very well be that those who think of their moral judgments as non-objective are wrong. Whatever commonsense might think, there may be objective values. The realist is moreover not necessarily committing herself to the view that moral thought is easy, or that most people are sufficiently reflective. In the case of Plato, for instance, while everyone has knowledge of the Good, it takes dialectic and fortunate circumstances to bring it to the surface.

The question therefore remains whether there are non-conventional, transcendental principles against which any manmade principle must answer, rather than just various purposes that such principles may serve.

2.2.3 Naturalism Explained

Shafer-Landau's non-naturalism stands in opposition not only to particular naturalist views, like utilitarianism, but to every view that seeks an explanation of ethics under

the naturalist paradigm ("broad/philosophical naturalism"). Before considering his grounds for rejecting this naturalist paradigm, we need an understanding of its defining commitments.

There are different ways of getting to what is essential about naturalism. We will help ourselves to Jesse Prinz's (2007) four part characterization according to which naturalism consists of:

1. The metaphysical commitment - there are no non-natural or supernatural entities like ghosts and elves. "It is the view that our world is limited by the postulates and laws of natural science. Nothing can exist that violates these laws, and all entities that exist must, in some sense, be composed of the entities that our best scientific theories recognize" (p. 2).
2. The explanatory commitment - everything must ultimately be describable in physical language. This does not mean that higher level facts, like, for example, the fact that something is a check-mate can be "reduced" to some lower level physical statement, or that the laws of chess can be derived from some physical laws. Rather, it means that "there must be some systematic correspondence between the levels. One must be able to map any entity at a high level onto

entities at a lower level, and one must be able to explain the instantiation of any higher level generalization by appeal to lower-level features that realize those generalizations" (p. 2).

3. The methodological commitment - there are no extra-natural ways of knowing. "If all facts are natural facts (according to metaphysical naturalism), then the methods by which we investigate facts must be suitable to the investigation of natural facts" (p. 3).
4. The commitment to transformational naturalism - "we are always operating within our current theories of the world. In making theoretical revisions, we cannot step outside our theories and adopt a transcendental stance" (p. 3).

These different views are often invoked to explain each other. Shafer-Landau, as we have seen, prefers to emphasize the epistemology. He understand naturalism as a commitment to a *posteriori* ways of knowing, and 'the natural' (metaphysical claim) as that which is knowable a *posteriori*. Shafer-Landau is thus taking the rationalist side in the seemingly perennial empiricist vs. rationalist debate. In their marvelous article "Naturalizing Ethics" Owen Flanagan, Hgop Sarkissian and David Wong (2008) describe the kind of naturalist approach to ethics that

Shafer-Landau rejects:

[N]aturalist ethics does have a number of substantive methodological commitments. Chief among these is the belief that moral philosophy should not employ a distinctive *a priori* method of yielding substantive, self-evident and foundational truths from pure conceptual analysis. The claims of ethical naturalism cannot be shielded from empirical testing. Indeed, the naturalist is committed to there being no sharp distinction between her investigation and those of relevant other disciplines (particularly between epistemology and psychology). In other words, ethical science must be continuous with other sciences. (p. 5)

Before turning to the reasons for rejecting this approach, let us briefly consider some examples of what has been accomplished within it since naturalist ethics has a long tradition. One example is Thomas Hobbes, who in *Leviathan* claimed to "have derived the Rights of Sovereign Power and the Duty of Subjects hitherto, from the Principles of Nature Solely such as experience has found true, or Consent... has made so; that is to say, from the Nature of Men, known to us by Experience and from Definitions...universally agreed on..." (1651/2010, ch. 32, par. 1) For Hobbes, "'Good' and 'evil' are inconstant names applied haphazardly by different men to what attracts or repels them." Other examples are Adam Smith (1759) and David Hume (1751) who explained ethics in terms of a psychology of emotions. And long before them there was Epicurus, who explains ethics as the consequence of self-

preservation: "Justice," he explains, "is a symbol for the expression of expediency, to prevent one man from harming or being harmed by another.'" (*Epicurus Sayings* 31)

Today naturalist ethics often works against an adaptionist background. Charles Darwin himself proposed an explanation of morality by providing natural history of the moral sentiments:

To the instinct of sympathy... it is primarily due that we habitually bestow both praise and blame on others, whilst we love the former and dread the latter when applied to ourselves; and this instinct was originally acquired, like all the other social instincts, through natural selection... [W]ith increased experience and reason man perceives the more remote consequences of his actions, and the self-regarding virtuous, such as temperance, chastity, etc., which during earlier times are utterly disregarded come to be highly esteemed and even held sacred... Ultimately our moral sense or conscience becomes a highly complex sentiment - originating in the social instincts, largely guided by the approbation of our fellow men, ruled by reason, self-interest, and in the later times by deep religious feelings, and confirmed by instruction and habit. (Darwin, 1871/2004 from Flanagan, et al., 2008)

Darwin's strategy of connecting an adaptionist back-story to the empiricist's theory of moral emotions is one of the most vital research programs today. To give but a taste of this kind of contemporary moral theorizing: Matt Ridley speculates that humans have evolved emotions with the purpose of helping them appear to be reliable team-players. The rewards for having this trait are the benefits

derived from cooperation. An individual who feels no compunction breaking his word, or abandoning a mate or a group, might quickly find himself in trouble. (Ridley, 1991) In the kind of trouble described by Antonio Damasio in *Descartes' Error* (1995). Damasio tells us that patients with brain damage to emotional centers of the brain cannot perform practical reasoning. He concludes that practical reasoning, as argued by Hume, is driven by emotions. Other studies show us that the emotional deficiency of psychopaths prevent them from grasping moral concepts. They can only *imitate* our use of moral concepts (Prinz, 2007). The celebrated work of psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2007) is emblematic of the naturalist approach today. He argues that we are often unable to provide reasons for our moral judgments -we are 'dumbfounded'- because they are intuitions and antecedent to any reason giving practice. The intuition, basically an emotion, comes first, the reasoning is *ad hoc*. Haidt has tested this hypothesis in cross-cultural clinical studies by asking people to justify claims such as whether it would be right for a family to eat their, accidentally killed, pet dog. This, if correct would vindicate Friedrich Nietzsche's (1881/1982) claim that, "The history of moral feelings is quite different from the history of moral concepts. The former are powerful

before the action, the latter especially after the action in face of the need to pronounce upon it." (section, 1.36)

To explain why we are such natural moralizers Haidt hypothesizes that the human mind has:

evolved modular systems that generate during enculturation, large numbers of more specific modules which help children recognize, quickly and automatically examples of culturally emphasized virtues... Virtues are socially constructed and socially learned, but constrained by the evolved mind. (p. 3)

These systems, Haidt further speculates, underlie our moral intuiting of the social world in terms of rights/fairness, harms/benefits, authority/respect, in-group/loyalty, purity/sanctity.

Correct or not, the works of Matt Ridley, Jesse Prinz, and Jonathan Haidt gives us an idea of the multi-disciplinary, sometimes experimental, approach characterizing contemporary naturalist moral theorizing.

2.2.4 The Rejection of Naturalism

It is impossible to deny that the naturalist paradigm steadily increases our understanding of ethics. And it does so, to borrow a phrase from Simon Blackburn, using stuff we "already know is there", rather than supposing moral stuff

to explain moral phenomena. It thus passes the so-called "external accommodation" test -the desiderata that an explanation be compatible with natural science. *Why then do Shafer-Landau and other non-naturalists believe that the paradigm is the wrong one for explaining ethics?*

Nowhere in *Moral Realism* does Shafer-Landau dispute Damasio's claim that people with injuries to their emotional centers cannot reason practically or the evidence that moral reasons are often rather *ad hoc* and secondary to people's moral judgments, or any of the other similar empirical findings. In fact they are not even mentioned. Why not? It is not that he does not know about them. It is because he and other non-naturalists believe that there is something about the naturalist approach as such which makes it blind to the most important aspect of morality, i.e. the recognition of moral truth.

Suppose for example that Haidt (2009) is right, and it is true, as he argues in "Moral Psychology and the misunderstanding of Religion", that liberals support the autonomy of young people and approve of their experimentation, sexual and otherwise, because they are more psychologically prone to value individual rights, while conservatives are less indulgent towards young people because they lean more psychologically towards the

authority/hierarchy and in-group/loyalty dimensions. What would determine which of these "socially constructed" and "biologically constrained" moral point-of-views - the liberal and the conservative - is the RIGHT one?

Or suppose that Matt Ridley (1991) is right and our emotions have evolved so as to make us want to appear like someone that other people would want to collaborate with: that our desire not to short-change anyone is the consequence of a long history of survival games. Does this show us that it is the morally *right* desire to have? Perhaps it is the right desire to have, but since all kinds of desires, including fierce in-group feelings, cruelty, incestuous desires, and so on, also have a long causal ancestry, it cannot be the causal genealogy, the adaptationist story, that shows us the *grounding* of the moral *correctness* of the desire and the actions it produces.

Consider as an illustration of this, Herbert Spencer's response to Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. Rather than decrying Darwin as undermining morality, Herbert Spencer (1851) argued that Darwin had provided it with a new foundation. If God has no plan for us, Nature does. We must go with the flow of evolution. We must be as *fit* as possible:

The poverty of the incapable, the distresses that come

upon the imprudent, the starvation of the idle, and those shoulderings aside of the weak by the strong, which leave so many 'in shallows and in miseries' are the decrees of a large, farseeing benevolence. (1851, Ch. 25)

This is an abhorrent view. And, more importantly for our purposes, it certainly does not follow from Darwin's theory. In fact it would seem as if every naturalist description of morality underdetermines any view of what underwrites moral judgments. This conclusion can be seen from two perspectives. First, from the perspective of the moral agent, it would seem to mean that he could never ever conclude what is the morally right thing to do, solely on the basis of even a *complete naturalistic description* of the world. Second, on the level of the student of morality, the meta-ethicist, it would mean that she could never say anything about what underwrites/justifies/makes true/grounds moral judgments from a purely naturalist perspective. Flanagan et al. (2008) put the point neatly:

[M]oral psychology, sociology, and anthropology (what Kant called the empirical side of morals) might tell us what groups and individuals think ought to be done, what they believe is right or wrong, what they deem a good person, and so on. However, all the human scientific facts taken together, including that they are widely and strongly believed, could never justify any of these views. (p. 12)

It implies that naturalism has a blind spot. Hume was referring to this blind spot when he argued that we cannot

derive an **ought** from an **is**. There are different interpretations of this claim known as "Hume's law." Non-naturalist philosophers believe that it shows that natural scientific methods cannot discover moral facts, and that therefore, if there are moral facts, then they are not natural: a naturalist meta-ethics necessarily omits the subject matter of ethics: the moral *facts*.

How important is this omission? Imagine that you are to explain morality to an intelligent and otherwise well-informed being who knows not what morality is (a Martian?). After you have given him some combination of the naturalist account, he would know the typical psychological states associated with moral thought. He would know their causal history. He would know which considerations we typically deem "moral." He would know the most common terms of moral language and their *typical* extensions. He would know about common overlaps and consistent failures of overlap in moral judgments between groups and between individuals. He would know about the implicit rules of moral language (that it signals certain emotional and behavioral commitments) and a lot more. Would he not know a great deal about morality? How much should the issue of what "grounds" moral truth worry the explainer of morality?

The non-naturalist would respond accordingly. Imagine

that the Marsian explains a practice of theirs to you, but says nothing about what determines when it's done the right way, and when it's done the wrong way. Or he explains some Marsian linguistic term, but says nothing about what would constitute *correct* usage. How much Marsian-speak do we really know, if we know all about their concepts and words, except for, in some general way, when they are, and when they are not, *correctly* applied? If moral concepts refer to something, but we have nothing to say - because of Hume's Law - about *which* things they *really* refer to, then the concepts have not been properly explained. For the non-naturalist realist the truth issue is *the* issue. Meta-ethics, Shafer-Landau (2005) writes, is "that area of ethical theory that *seeks to determine whether there is any objective basis that underwrites moral judgments*" (p. 263). It seeks to ascertain "whether claims of these kinds could be true" (p. 263). This narrow definition of meta-ethics would seem to mean that other insights about morality, such as those mentioned above, are to be considered as outside its scope.

The non-naturalist accepts Hume's law and he believes that it forces us to make a choice between accepting either that there are no moral facts, or that these facts are non-

natural.¹¹ The choice is between one of the following two arguments:

From Naturalism to Nihilism

P1 Natural facts cannot tell us about what grounds moral judgments. Moral facts are not natural facts.

P2 Natural facts are all the facts there are.

C There are no moral facts.

From Folk Realism to Non-Naturalism

P1 There are moral facts. (That kicking babies is wrong is one of them)

P2 Natural science cannot discover moral facts.

C Moral facts are not natural.

¹¹ Both Moore and Shafer-Landau sometimes cast the distinction in terms of "descriptive facts", and "normative facts". If we cannot "derive" normative facts, from descriptive facts, then we must either hold that since all facts are descriptive, there are no normative facts/no knowledge of such possible, or that since there are moral facts, they are not descriptive but *sui generis* normative. Or, if moral facts are not natural, and all the facts are natural, then there are no moral facts.

This is commonly held to be an unavoidable dichotomy. Consider as an illustration the *Edinburgh Review's* observation that if Darwin were right then the transcendental realism underwritten by God's plan for us - a super-natural foundation- would be invalidated and therefore "most earnest-minded men will be compelled to give up these motives by which they have attempted to live noble and virtuous lives, as founded on a mistake" (Wright, 1995, p. 328). The conclusion here seems to be that nihilism is implied by Darwinism. Moral claims are neither wrong, nor right - it's all a big illusion.

Many reject the dilemma by arguing for some form of naturalist account of what "underwrites moral judgments". In remainder of Chapter 2, I will expound and explain Shafer-Landau's rejection of these alternative theories.¹²

¹² Today the meta-ethical landscape contains four primary strategies:

- a) openly embracing nihilism (Greene, Joyce),
- b) trying to show either that Hume's Law is false, or that it does not prevent the naturalist from finding a foundation (relativism (Prinz), constructivism (Scanlon), naturalist realism (Boyd))
- c) abandoning naturalism, like Shafer-Landau's view or
- d) showing how sentimentalism is compatible with folk realism when properly construed. (Blackburn, Gibbard)

2.3. Alternate Theories Considered

My goals of 2.3 are to show why nihilism is unattractive and why a non-naturalist like Shafer-Landau believes that there is no tenable middle-ground between stark nihilism and non-naturalist realism.

The dialectic is this: Shafer-Landau interprets our moral experience as committing us to the existence of an objective moral reality. All naturalist theories are nihilist about a *non-natural* moral reality. But if they are not what may be called starkly nihilist, they will believe in a *moral reality of some sort*. The relativist will see it as relative to the commitments of an individual and his culture, the contractualist will see it as relative to choices made by ideal agents in an ideal situation, naturalists like Boyd will see it as constituted by whatever natural fact best explains the intended referent of moral thought and talk, and the quasi-realist will see it as a consequence, a kind of *epiphenomena*, of moralizing.

Shafer-Landau rejects these proposals because they fail to deliver the kind of strong objectivity he believes that moral commonsense commits us to. In other words, Shafer-Landau believes that all broadly naturalist views fail the so-called "Internal Accommodation test", the

desiderata of theoretical adequacy that the explanation respects the phenomena. The views considered will be in the order mentioned: emotivism, relativism, constructivism, naturalist realism and quasi-realism.

2.3.1 Emotivism

Part of the *prima facie* attraction of non-naturalist realism is that it is better than moral nihilism, the view that there are no moral facts. According to this view, there are no moral rights and no obligations; nothing is good, nothing is evil etc.

A.J. Ayer's emotivism often serves as the archetype. Ayer, in the 1940s was known as "the most dangerous man in Oxford" for his frightening combination of atheism and moral nihilism, followed the empiricist tradition in locating the moral judgment in emotions. In *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936/1946) Ayer writes:

If I say to someone 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money', I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, 'you stole that money'. In adding that this action is wrong, I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval about it. It is as if I had said, 'You stole that money', in a peculiar tone of horror, or written with the exclamation marks. The tone, the exclamation marks, adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker. ... If I now generalize my previous statement and say, 'Stealing money is wrong,' I

produce a sentence which has no factual meaning - that is, expresses no proposition that can be either true or false. (p. 107)

If moral statements cannot be true or false, then it would seem that there could be no rational thought or debate about values. This implication is complacently accepted by Ayer:

[I]t is impossible to dispute about value judgments... For as we hold that such sentences as 'thrift is a virtue' and 'thrift is a vice' do not express propositions at all, we clearly cannot hold that they express incompatible propositions... What we do not and cannot argue about is the validity of ... moral principles. (p. 107)

The implication then must be that it is not true that the 9/11 terrorist attack was evil. We and Bin Laden have *different* feelings about it. This is all that can be said; this is the last word.

Another form of nihilism is error theory, famously formulated by J.L Mackie (1977) and today defended by, among others, Richard Joyce (2001) and Josh Greene (2002). Mackie (1977) argued in *Morality -Inventing right and wrong* that moral thought and language purports to describe a world of objective values, but that since there can be no such values, every moral claim is false/mistaken. It becomes a pragmatic question whether we want to continue to

moralize. Mackie defends morality as a useful fiction. False moral beliefs help curb selfishness and it is therefore "important that there should be a widespread tendency to act on moral grounds" (p.124). In *The Myth of Morality*, Richard Joyce argues that moral thought has been selected for because it enhances reproductive fitness. Since the account of why we have moral concepts is thus causal-historical, there is no need to invoke moral facts. We would have had the belief that there are categorical reasons/moral obligations whether this belief is true or not. Knowing that this is so, he agrees with Mackie that morality can be a useful myth.

An even more extreme form of nihilism argues that since moral discourse is built on a false presupposition, we should abolish it. We can call this eliminative nihilism, in contrast to Mackie's and Joyce's retentive nihilism/fictionalism. The eliminativist argues that the concepts of moral thought and language are more harmful than beneficiary, and that to continue to moralize while knowing that it's nothing but make-believe, is to nourish and indulge a culture of deception of that particular kind Sartre named "*mauvais foi*" or *bad faith*. They point to the fact that conventional moral concepts have been used and

are used to justify any behavior, and they suggest that talk of rights and obligations and other moral concepts, makes it harder to resolve disagreements. Indeed, the eliminativist nihilist blames moral thought for facilitating and perpetuating war and exploitation and believe that only if we stop being moral, can mankind progress, and avoid self-destruction! Ian Hinkfuss (1987) argues in this spirit that morality is fuel for violent conflict and imagines a post-moral world where "there would be no sense of duty, no sense of loyalty, no patriotism, no feeling morally obliged to fight for a cause, no sense that the people one is trying to kill or subjugate are less worthy of survival and freedom than oneself or anyone else" (pp. 45-46). In the same spirit Josh Greene (2002) -one of the rising stars of experimental moral theory- proposes

that the fate of humankind will turn on our ability, or inability, to transcend the common sense morality we inherited from our ancestors. The great global problems of our time—the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the disruption of the environment, etc.—can only be solved through cooperation and compromise among people with radically different moral outlooks. And this, I believe, is unlikely to happen so long as the people of the world hold fast to their respective versions of moral common sense. (p.3)

Instead of thinking in terms of rights and wrongs, good and bad, obligations and rights, we should get real, and simply recommend or protest actions, characters and

principles on the grounds of the subjective values they realize or fail to realize. We can protest 9/11, not by calling it wrong and evil -there are no such properties- but by saying that the act destroyed life and property that we -as a matter of fact- value.

The theories of Ayer, Mackie, Joyce and Greene, deny that there are moral reasons as understood by commonsense objectivism. They imply the seemingly perverse propositions that that 9/11 was not evil, and that it is not wrong to, say, set a cat on fire just to watch it burn. This offends moral commonsense. The seeming perversity of nihilism is a *prima facie* reason for accepting non-naturalism.

2.3.2 Relativism

Our empirical studies tell us what "groups and individuals think ought to be done, what they deem a good person, and so on..." so why not think that moral truth is constituted by such thoughts? Indeed, what else could found moral truth but actual practices as we find them? "Moral" is after all derived from the latin word "mores" which means habits. As Ruth Benedict (1934) argued,

We do not any longer make the mistake of deriving the morality of our locality and decade directly from the inevitable constitution of human nature. We do not

elevate it to the dignity of a first principle. We recognize that morality differs in every society, and is a convenient term for socially approved habits. Mankind has always preferred to say, 'It is morally good,' rather than 'It is habitual,' and the fact of this preference is matter enough for a critical science of ethics. But historically the two phrases are synonymous. (p. 59)

The cultural relativist understands the moral code of a society much like most of us would understand its legal code or its language. It is a result of solving the task of living together. The code will inevitably vary between groups, but for each group there are definite answers on some issues concerning how to live. Relativism shares the cognitivist element of realism. Moral beliefs are beliefs about what your culture believes to be right and wrong, or in Benedict's words, what is habitual. Because of the possibility of this "reduction" of the moral to the natural -what is habitual is a natural fact- relativism is sometimes categorized as a form of naturalist realism. Since whether something is habitual or not, is a fact and it is independent of what any particular individual member thinks or feels about it, it also captures to some extent the categoricity of moral reasons.

Consider our own culture today in the USA. If you are consulted by a company to make their conduct more "ethical" you would be acting in (comically) bad faith if you

consistently recommended that they do whatever most forcefully expresses their Will to Power, or that they ruthlessly "shoulder aside the weak", or perhaps that they should just stay authentic to whatever they see themselves as being. It would be in bad faith because you know that this is not what we mean by "ethical" behavior. There is a narrow understanding of "ethical" or "moral" that already contains an idea of a limited range of considerations and phenomena. It has to do with respecting other people, caring about general wellbeing, playing fair, act in accordance with the demands of your roles, and demonstrate proper loyalty. In this familiar sense, "moral" or "ethical" means "morally right". For example, to propose that it would be *ethical* for an affluent employer to lower the wage of older employees simply because it's hard for them to relocate and find a new job, cannot be taken seriously. It could be called "exploitation" or "good business", but it could not be called "ethical". Or to propose that it would be *fair* for a professor to distribute grades according to the degree of cuteness of his students reveals a misunderstanding of what "fair" means. Such a distribution criterion can be called many things; "confused" comes to mind, but not "fair". The moral reality in which we are situated thus provides us with norms.

Understanding these norms is simply part of cultural literacy. It's like knowing one's language. This means that it could be that Hume's Law does not ultimately hold, since it is a natural fact what norms are immanent to our culture! Consider a closely related argument by Searle (1964). Searle argues that to promise to do something A, is the act of putting oneself under the obligation to do A. This means that we can conclude that we have an obligation to do A. This Searle believes demonstrates that we can derive an ought from an is. It is a fact, an "institutional fact" that if you promise something, then you ought to keep your promise. Given the institution of promise making -a man-made, mind-dependent entity- you have an obligation to keep it. But there is no such *natural* obligation.

What does Shafer-Landau and the robust realist think is wrong about the relativist approach? The main problem is that if what underwrites moral judgments for an individual is what his or her culture thinks, then it would seem to follow that the most reprehensible practices including slavery, racism, cliterodectomy, and honor-killings would be perfectly justified for someone at some point. This contradicts commonsense. Commonsense tells us that there is a difference between what the many think is right and what

really is right. The cultural relativist cannot draw this distinction. This becomes an urgent practical problem when globalization and immigration connects and diffuses different moral worlds. It is certainly possible that from the framework of Kurdish honor-ethics some disobedient daughter ought to be killed, but what if she lives in Germany, or Sweden? The consistent relativist must hold as *his own* belief that she ought to be killed, since his meta-ethics recognizes culture as the foundation of moral truth.

Moreover, we can recognize what our moral system tells us what we ought to do, but a) we do not *eo ipso* discover that we have a moral reason to do it, and b) we are not necessarily irrational or immoral if we reject these demands in favor of different values.

Mackie (1977) objects to Searle's "promise argument" that although it is true that if someone makes a promise then he is expected to keep it, because it first of all does not show us that we really *ought* to make promises,¹³

¹³ This is why Mackie's translation of "good" as meaning 'to-be-pursued' and 'right' as 'to-be-done' and 'wrong' as 'not-to-be-done' is clarifying. A robustly realist ground for morality would be factuality about what *is to be*. It is not whether it is a fact that relative to some framework, x is considered "good", but whether x is such that it is to be pursued that would be the *moral* fact about it. Any 'ought' derived from a cultural practice or institution or hypothetical choice must, according to the realist, be checked against the proper moral fact that what

at least not in the sense of "ought" that matters. This would only be the case if the institution itself is good, and this has not been established by the argument. To illustrate: according to the institution of honor morality, if a man catches his wife talking with another man without his permission, he ought to beat her up. But this is only a *real* duty, commonsense tell us, if the institution of honor morality is valid: a judgment seemingly presupposing a culturally transcendent moral truth. There is no simple derivation from a promise to the fact that keeping it is what really ought to be done. And more generally, there is no guarantee that moral literacy is also moral knowledge.

To conclude, relativist culturally "immanent" moral realism fails the internal accommodation test, because the facts defended lack, as so well put by Mackie, "final authority with regards to our actions".

2.3.3 Constructivism

Commonsense realism rejects a view of moral reality as constructed by actual people in real historical

it prescribes, really is to be done. That is has to-be-doneness.

circumstances. But perhaps it can be seen as constructed by idealized agents in idealized circumstances. Examples of such approaches are Scanlon's contractualism (1998), Firth's ideal observer theory (1952), Korsgaard's Kantianism (1996), and Rawls's contractarianism (1971). These views promise to capture both the categoricity and the impartiality of moral judgments. The impartiality of these views is achieved by insisting on truth being the product, not of "parochial" opinion, but of a perspective transcending individual preferences and, unlike cultural relativism, various cultural and historical contingencies. The categoricity is preserved *to the extent* that moral truths are not necessarily contingent on any particular individual's or group's goals. Showing that some moral obligation fails to promote the satisfaction of some desire an agent may have does not necessarily remove the obligation. The obligation is the consequence of an idealized choice that she may or may not agree with and hence is not hostage to subjective desires.

Despite this, there are reasons for thinking that constructivism is either a form of relativism, or is implicitly relying on a more robust realism. Shafer-Landau (2003) believes that constructivist views all succumb to a classic dilemma:

Either the initial conditions of choice or attitude formation are moralized or they are not. In other words, we are to envision the initial conditions as already incorporating moral constraints or as operating free of such constraints. The problem with the latter option is that there is no reason to expect that the principles will capture our deepest convictions or respect the various platitudes that fix our understanding of ethical concepts. (p. 21)

The problem is that in order to guarantee that the outcome of the construction does not contradict our fundamental moral beliefs, these fundamental moral beliefs must inform our choice of idealizing constraints. This problem is long-standing and familiar.¹⁴ Shafer-Landau (2003) takes us back to Plato.

The dilemma pressed against the constructivist is a variation of one first found in the Euthyphro. There the question was whether the divine approval constituted the piety of acts or whether it was simply a good criterion of such acts, their pious nature being constituted by something else. Plato chose the latter option, because the former made divine approval arbitrary, thereby undercutting the goodness of the gods. If the attitudes of idealized agents are worthy to fix moral truth then these attitudes must be developed in response to reasons. But then the reasons come first. So if constructivism is to avoid dignifying arbitrary choices of idealized agents, and if it is to avoid lapsing in to realism, then it must insist that these choices are exemplary because of having been formed through exceptional attentiveness to *non-moral* reasons. But if the reasons that are

¹⁴ A traditional complaint against Hobbes contractarianism is that he cannot explain the origin of all moral obligations through the agreement of contractors to limit their claims to everything, because unless there is already an obligation in place to keep promises, the agreement would not generate any obligations! Unless they have an obligation to honor contracts, the contract cannot oblige them to anything.

constraining the choices of the favored agents are not moral reasons, it is hard to see why the outcome of the initial conditions should be definitive of morality. (p. 43)

In the work of Rawls' (1993) political morality there is an acceptance of the limitations of the objectivist ambitions of constructivism in political philosophy. "What justifies a conception of justice" he writes "is not its being true to an order antecedent to and given to us, but that it is congruent with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our tradition" (p. 248). Our powers of moral reflection on the basic rules we wish to govern our society are

not fixed once and for all but are developed by a shared public culture and hence shaped by that culture... The essential point is that a conception of justice fulfills its social role provided citizens equally conscientious and sharing roughly the same beliefs find that, by affirming the framework of deliberation set up by it, they are normally led to a sufficient convergence of opinion. (p. 257)

This is meant to hold true about *political* morality and therefore primarily concerned with just distribution of goods, and the rights of citizens, so it's perhaps logically possible to combine this view with the view that there is some way of constructing fundamental moral principles outside the political realm in a way avoiding Shafer-Landau's dilemma. However it's more natural to think

that either the constructivist must recognize that some moral facts are not constructed -Shafer-Landau's straight-forward realism- or that moral truth is relative to our "morally arbitrary" or historically-culturally evolved contingent starting points.

These are reasons for why Shafer-Landau and those who share his concern about moral objectivity, are not satisfied with a *constructed* moral reality.¹⁵

2.3.4 Analytic and Reductive Naturalist Realism

One way of finding the objective moral fact is to find the correct analysis of key moral terms. When this analysis is provided in natural terms, as when goodness is equated with pleasure, the analysis gives us a naturalist realism. Against this view Shafer-Landau makes use of Moore's (1922) famous open question argument (OQA). Moore argued that goodness could not be analyzed in non-moral terms. The proof is that for every proposed definition, it is always

¹⁵ William J. FitzPatrick puts this nicely in a very perceptive unpublished paper "Robust Realism Non-Naturalism and Normativity". "We suspect" he writes "that getting correct results from deliberation depends crucially on having the right starting points - where the right starting point cannot be correctly specified except from within a correct substantive ethical view about, for example, which character traits embody proper sensitivity to relevant real values and other considerations, and about what kinds of experiences are necessary to developing such sensitivities." (p. 9)

possible to meaningfully ask whether the content of the proposed definition is good. If, for example, good is identified with pleasure, it is still possible to ask, of something x that is pleasurable whether it is good, thus showing that being pleasurable and being good is not the same thing.

There has been much criticism of Moore's argument. Some argue that it's in the nature of every definition which is not obvious, that it can be questioned. Others complain that the inference from the fact that the moral good cannot be defined in non-moral terms, that these terms do not in fact succeed in referring to the moral good. The example here is water and H_2O . The concept of water is not the concept of H_2O , and someone can know that something is water while denying that it is H_2O , but water is, according to this view, still H_2O . These criticisms notwithstanding, Shafer-Landau believes that the OQA places the burden of proof on the naturalist to deliver some plausible analysis of moral terms into non-moral language, or at least find a semantics showing that moral properties are identical to natural properties.

Naturalists have abandoned the project of finding meaning equivalences between moral and non-moral terms. Their strategy is rather to show that moral properties are

identical to natural properties. This is usually referred to as "reductive" naturalism because it claims that moral properties are nothing over and above certain natural properties, like water, according to some, is nothing over and above H₂O. This means, to revert to our utilitarian, that although "A is the right action" does not mean the same as "A brings about the greatest amount of pleasure", the property of being the right action is the same as the property of bringing about the greatest amount of pleasure. And its *truth condition* is that it brings about the greatest amount of pleasure. There are two concepts, two terms, but only one property. There is metaphysical reduction, without conceptual reduction.

A challenge for reductive naturalism is to provide a semantics that gives us a reason for thinking that moral terms refer to natural properties. Which properties would they be? Shafer-Landau (2003) discusses proposals by Richard Boyd (1988) and David Brink (2001). Richard Boyd proposes a causal semantics. His view is that the meaning of a moral term is fixed in a certain complex historical process initiated by a 'dubbing ceremony' where the speakers are in direct touch with the properties their term names. This picture is Kripkean in that it seeks the meaning of a term not by focusing on a list of descriptions

in the speakers mind, but in an actual historical process.

There are many obvious problems with this view: Shafer-Landau objects that

If it turns out that different properties are causally responsible... for the usage of the very same moral terms among different speakers then those terms mean different things in the mouths of these speakers. It follows from this that many who think that they are engaged in substantive moral disagreement with their fellows are engaged in no such thing. ... [I]nstead they are talking past each other. (p. 68)

He also notes that Boyd's view seems incapable of avoiding relativism since it seeks the meaning in *actual* historical circumstances which may vary strongly between and within cultures. Why would we be obliged to pursue whatever our ancestors managed to pick out with their use of 'good'? If on the other hand, the naturalist decides to accept *some* uses as authoritative (normative) for us but not others, then this is obviously not itself a choice that can be made from a purely scientific point of view.

David Brink (1989) argues that moral facts are whatever best satisfies the intentions of moralizers. The intention he ventures is one of finding ways of life that can be given reasons for that "we all" can accept ("intersubjectively justifiable"). If, say, a principle has the property of being such that reasons can be given for it that "we all" can agree upon, then it's morally ok. This

property, Brink believes is a natural property. Shafer-Landau admits that -metaphysically speaking- there isn't much difference between him and the Cornell realists:

The only difference between these contemporary non-reductive naturalists and ethical non-naturalists lies in whether or not one is willing to count moral properties as natural ones. And as far as I can tell, the only importance in the classification at this stage is methodological and epistemological. The importance lies in whether we are willing to count ethics as a science... (p. 64)

For Brink's view to remain naturalist it must be shown that knowledge of irreducible moral properties is empirical. But it is hard to see how Brink's proposed property of being intersubjectively justifiable is constituted by a property that is also recognizable from a purely empirical scientific point of view. Something is justifiable because it has *good* reasons supporting it, reasons which ought to be accepted, and this does not seem to be a concept that can be formulated in a purely scientific vocabulary. Indeed, given the messy nature of the phenomena, it is reasonable to assume that any "discovery" of the non-reducible moral property, will involve choices and standards unlike those normally employed by the empirical sciences. That is, people can agree to a system of strong inequality -even those who suffer under it- because they have actually done so. What

Brink should really mean by "can" is can "reasonably" given certain assumptions about their ends etc. The "can agree to" is a moral or normative judgment, rather than a typical scientific and scientifically testable one.

In addition there are modal features of moral properties that cast doubt on the classification of them as natural. To mention one, the supervenience of moral properties on non-moral/natural properties is commonly thought to be necessary and *a priori* whereas the supervenience of higher-order natural properties on other properties is seen as contingent and *a posteriori*. To illustrate, it is an *a posteriori* contingent fact, if a fact at all, that mental properties supervene on neural properties. That is: it's incoherent to say that *a* is a good act, but that *a** is not, and that they are identical in their non-moral aspects, but it is *not* incoherent to say that Charles believes that he is in Paris, but Charles* does not, and that they are identical in their neural properties. In fact, dualists and externalists about mental content deny this supervenience claim. Chapter 4 will concern moral properties, so we will leave the matter for now *in media res*.

To conclude: It seems as if "narrow" naturalist realism, like ideal contract theories, are either forms of

relativism, or, if they pretend to more objectivity, are covertly relying on (non-naturalist/robustly) realist assumptions.

2.3.5 Quasi-Realism

So far we have seen that emotivism, relativism, constructivism or naturalist realism do not have the consequence that there are facts about how to live in the sense assumed by commonsense realism. This provides the *prima facie* case for nonnaturalism. Before turning to Mackie's seminal critique of non-naturalism, and Shafer-Landau's new and fascinating ways of handling it, we can achieve further clarification of its essential commitments by considering expressivist quasi-realism.

Expressivists agree with the non-naturalist realists that finding out how to live is not like finding out how things stand in the world of science. And like the non-naturalists they believe that moral concepts are irreducible. But rather than taking this to mean that moral thought is about a *sui generis* moral world, they see it as a consequence of its *particular function*. Moral judgements, they argue, have a non-representational content, a desire-like state, and moral discourse is essentially an instrument for expressing it. A clarification: the

expressivist's claim is not that there is no descriptive content communicated. If you tell me that some girl is chaste, then I know that she is, as Merriam-Webster has it, "free from all taint of what is lewd and lascivious". And if a conservative Muslim tells me that a girl is "good", then I can infer that part of what he means is that she is subservient to men. The point insisted on by expressivists and non-naturalists alike, is that this descriptive content does not a) give us the particular moral content, and b) it does not constitute truth conditions in the appropriate sense. Agreement about which girls are chaste is not *moral* agreement, the expressivist believes, unless there is an agreement in *attitudes* towards chastity. And unless we are relativists, the fact that our Muslim treats subservience as part of his truth conditions for "good girl" has absolutely no bearing on whether it is true that subservience makes girls good.

This should sound familiar. Respect for the Open Question Argument unites expressivists and non-naturalists. Despite its flaws, they believe that it shows us that what is at stake in moral matters is not simply what natural properties are instantiated but something else. For the non-naturalist this something else is the *non-natural* moral property. For the expressivist, it is what attitudes (and

actions) we are to take towards the natural properties.

Sometimes "expressivism" refers to all meta-ethical theories holding that the function of moral discourse is not primarily descriptive. A.J Ayer's emotivism, Stevenson's emotivism and R.M Hare's prescriptivism are expressivisms in this sense. Here we will focus on what Simon Blackburn (1998) labeled "quasi-realist" expressivism: the view that expressivism is (more than) compatible with folk-realism. The main proponents of quasi-realism are Allan Gibbard (2003), and the just-mentioned Blackburn whose theory will serve as our example of this approach. Blackburn follows the Humean tradition of locating the nature of the moral judgment in our sentiments:

We should think in terms of a staircase of practical and emotional ascent. At the bottom are simple preferences, likes, and dislikes. More insistent is a basic hostility to some kind of action or character or situation: a primitive aversion to it, or a disposition to be disgusted by it... we can then ascend to reactions to such emotions... going up another step, the sentiment may even become compulsory in my eyes, meaning that I have become prepared to express hostility to those who do not themselves share it. Going up another level, I may think that this hostility is compulsory, and be prepared to come in to conflict with those who, while themselves concerned with what was done, tolerate those who do not care about it. I shall regard dissent as beyond the pale, unthinkable. (p. 9)

The distinctive function of moral language is to

express these emotions. This core function takes on a variety of forms such as that of "forbidding, permitting, grading, backing off, communicating emotions like anger, resentment, embarrassment or shame, voicing attitudes such as admiration, or disdain or contempt, or even disgust, queering conduct, pressing attack, warding off" (p. 51). Unlike the proto-expressivist Ayer, who admitted that his "boo!Hoorah!" theory contradicted commonsense realism, Blackburn believes that his theory can accommodate it. Indeed, he claims that -unlike realism- his theory can, within the naturalist paradigm, show *why we appropriately* speak of moral truth, moral beliefs, moral facts, and moral properties.

This may strike the reader as a hopeless project. How can an emotion or a stance and its linguistic expression be true or false? If my *love* of black walnut icecream, and its linguistic expression: "Black walnut icecream is yummy!" cannot be true or false, then why think that my *disdain* for Bin Laden, and its linguistic expression "Bin Ladin is evil" can be true or false?

Blackburn's answer is that both of these judgments and statements can be true or false because they can be asserted and denied. All we need to know about Truth is given by the linguistic convention that P is true, if and

only if p. To say that it is wrong to kick babies, is to say that it is true that it is wrong to kick babies. "True" may add emphasis, avoid tiresome repetitions -it's easier to say that all that Simon says is true, than to say; if Simon says p, then p, if Simon says q, then q, etc.- but it does not denote a property that is off limits to non-representational states and their linguistic expressions. Blackburn is here exploiting a deflationary, non-metaphysical approach to truth found in the philosophies of F.P. Ramsay, Ludwig Wittgenstein and these days defended by Paul Horwich (2004). In two brief paragraphs Wittgenstein defines minimalism, applies it to ethical statements, and draws a conclusion that, if true, would make robust moral realism impossible to even state:

Someone may say, 'There is still the difference between truth and falsity. Any ethical judgment in whatever system may be true or false.' Remember that 'p is true' means simply 'p'. If I say 'Although so and so is good, I may be wrong': this means no more than that what I asserted may be denied. ... Or suppose that someone says 'One of these ethical systems must be the right one -or nearer the right one' Well, suppose I say Christian ethics is the right one. Then I am making a judgment of value. It amounts to adopting Christian ethics. It is not like saying that one of these physical theories must be the right one. The way in which some reality corresponds -or conflicts- with a physical theory has no counter-part here. (From Blackburn, 2005, p. 132)

Deflationary views about truth set off a conceptual chain reaction whereby the notions of "fact" and "property" and

even "real" and "objective" are similarly stripped of their metaphysical content and made kosher for the anti-realist. This consequence was clearly seen by Wittgenstein's contemporary and major influence, the Cambridgean wunderkind F.P. Ramsay (1904-30). Ramsay, Blackburn (1998) writes,

argues that it is not by staring at the word "true" that progress is made, but by understanding the function of various kinds of judgement in behavioral terms. Because of the minimalism we can have for free what look like a ladder of philosophical ascent: 'p', 'it is true that p', 'it is really and truly a fact that p', for none of these terms in Ramsay's marks an addition to the original judgement. You can as easily make the last judgement as the first -Ramsey's ladder is lying on the ground, horizontal. (1998, 78)

This is the same point as we saw Wittgenstein make. To generalize it: there is no position from outside ethical frameworks -an Archimedean point- from where to voice "theoretical" or "meta-normative" views about what might underwrite them. Any such view is internal to the framework we find ourselves in. It is "itself a judgment of value."

Because he accepts Ramsay's Ladder, Blackburn believes that he can without ontological scruples affirm robustly realist sounding claims like Shafer-Landau's claim that "Genocide is wrong" are "really true, or really factually true, or really in accordance with the eternal harmonies and verities that govern the universe" (p. 79). Blackburn

lists four meanings that "objectivity" can have in ethics once we have accepted meta-ethical minimalism:

1. The degree of detachment that one ought to take to issues.
2. The need to take up and respect the common point of view of Hume and Smith.
3. Fairness and impartiality, the virtue above all of courts and public administration.
4. The recognition that it is not our own opinions that ground the rightness and wrongness of things.

"Objectivity" Blackburn writes, "in all these senses is a moral virtue, and one to be striven for and respected" (p. 308). Since these are the important *possible* meanings of moral objectivity, *this is moral objectivity*.¹⁶ It is not a *meta-ethical* mistake to not believe in objectivity, it is, if Blackburn is right, *immoral*.

Why does Shafer-Landau reject quasi-realism with its

¹⁶ Blackburn's position is that Ramsay's ladder and the distinction between internal and external questions and statements imply that Shafer-Landau and the non-naturalist realists cannot make the kind of meta-ethical claims that they wish to make (and believe themselves to be making):

...like Ramsey I have said for many years, the theoretical temperature should remain the same whether we say 'slavery is bad', or 'it is true that slavery is bad', or 'it is really true and corresponds to the world that slavery is bad', or the like. Call this *metaethical minimalism*. There is not a self-extracting ladder of philosophical ascent here. So people cannot rely on their ordinary (moral) reactions to propositions couched in these terms to make allegedly theoretical, philosophical capital. (1996, p. 1)

seductively sleek metaphysics, in favor of a clunky old-fashioned metaphysical realism? Before answering this question, let us put to rest the suspicion that there is nothing between non-naturalism and quasi-realism. R.M. Hare (1952) believed that there was no sense of "moral reality" held by the realist that the anti-realist need reject, and that the real issue is between descriptivist and non-descriptivist views of language. The possibility of Mackie's Error Theory holding that moral language is descriptive, but that what it describes does not exist, seems to disprove Hare's position. But there is a different worry. Namely that quasi-realism either collapses in to "real-realism" or is inconsistent. Crispin Wright (1993) writes,

The trouble is that the overall package is so easily charged with incoherence. The charge is that it starts by depending on a contrast -that between attitudes and so forth on the one hand, and beliefs on the other. But it typically ends up by assimilating them so closely that, it may be charged, the initial contrast seems to evaporate. We understand the contrast in the beginning, so a critic might say, by thinking of beliefs, as opposed to attitudes, as capable of negation and disjunction, as sustaining truth, falsity and probability, and as objects of doubt and denial. But the forms of language that embody these capabilities are precisely the ones that the quasi-realist claims to earn for his attitudes. So in that case the original contrast collapses, and with it any coherent position. We cannot say that "such and such commitments are not beliefs; they are other states properly sustaining the appearance of being beliefs" if properly sustaining the appearance is all there is

to being a belief -all there is to marking off beliefs from attitudes in the first place. (p. 366)

This objection rests on a misunderstanding of the expressivist project. The project is not essentially the *negative* one of denying that there are moral beliefs, but the *positive* one of explaining morality assuming no *sui generis* moral features.¹⁷ For the quasi-realist the cognitive surface structure is, as for the realist, the starting point, the phenomena, but unlike the realist, they seek to explain it, in other, wholly non-moral terms, essentially involving our conative side.¹⁸ This is the sense

¹⁷ The really important thing is that it's an explanatory story. It gives... genealogical story of how the moral proposition comes to be an object of thought." (Ethic@)

¹⁸ This is also how Allan Gibbard (2003) explains the difference between cognitivism and non-cognitivism despite minimalism (deflationism): "I start simply from us as planners, able to think what to do now and in future contingencies, and conducting thought experiments on what to do in plights that are merely hypothetical. From this starting point, familiar normative phenomena emerge: We see how oughts "supervene" on natural iss, the ways that what a person ought to do supervenes on the natural facts of the situation. A kind of naturalism is a further consequence: there is a broadly natural property, I argue, that constitutes being the thing to do. The system that results mimics most closely the "non-naturalism" of G.E.Moore, A.C.Ewing, and others. I begin, then, as a naturalist about human thinking and planning, but in a sense I end up a non-naturalist about oughts. Much of what the non-naturalist says is right, I conclude -but this needn't be [?] mysterious to any naturalist. Simon Blackburn calls this program we share quasi-realism: from a basis that excludes normative facts and treats humanity as part of the natural

in which expressivism is a reductive theory -it explains what we do not know in terms of what we know or understand better. As an analogy, consider the scientific realist view that color perception is a result of being impacted by particles lacking in colors. Your experience of a red tomato is explained as an effect of being affected by radiation reflected by the surface of the tomato. This story does not imply that you should stop calling tomatoes red nor that it is not true that tomatoes are red. It is true that tomatoes are red in the sense *allowed for by the theory*.¹⁹ In fact the theory when connected to the adaptionist genealogy will show *why* color vision is important. The point of scientific realism is not nihilism about colors, but the best explanation of color perception. (To say that we see tomatoes as red, *because* they are red, although true, fails to be informative.)

James Dreier (2004) helpfully provides a name for this understanding of what is at stake, given minimalism, between *quasi*-realists and realists. He calls it the "Explanation Explanation":

world, I explain why we would have normative concepts acting much like normative realists proclaim." (p. xii)

¹⁹ From the point of view of the quasi-realist, the metaphysical moral realist is akin to the naive realism about colors that pushed Berkeley in to radical idealism.

Crucial to maintaining the difference in meta-ethics, in the twenty-first century, between realism and anti-realism is the possibility that concepts (and meanings) can differ in ways other than their content. Or, if the difference between normative (evaluative, or planning concepts) and descriptive (naturalistic) ones can also be stated as a difference in content, then at least it must be a comprehensible, substantive question whether the difference in concept is explained by (or if you prefer amounts to no more than) a difference in content, on the one hand, or rather if it is explained by (amounts to) something else entirely, which in turn explains the difference in content. The divide between realism and irrealism, at least in meta-ethics, rests on the substance of questions about metaphysical explanation. (p. 20)

Dreier's Explanation Explanation fits well with how Blackburn and Shafer-Landau understand their differences. Additionally, they agree to differ on the issue of representation. As we have seen, Shafer-Landau holds that moral beliefs *represent* moral properties. Blackburn denies that moral beliefs represent moral properties. Like Wittgenstein, Blackburn holds that there is a significant difference between how moral theories are true, and, as Wittgenstein put it, the "way in which some reality corresponds -or conflicts- with a physical theory..." Indeed, Blackburn insists that the notion of representation is essential to maintaining the theoretical identity of expressivism given minimalism. So despite his liberality with moral truth his view remains (classically) psychologically non-cognitivist. The response to Wright is

that the quasi-realist avoids collapse into realism despite minimalism, because his explanation sees moral judgements as essentially non-representational, and his ontological commitments include no moral entities in the role of explainers.

With this refined appreciation of the difference between quasi-realism and realism, we can return to our question: *Why* is Shafer-Landau not tempted by quasi-realism? Quasi-realism is unsatisfactory to Shafer-Landau because, although it accepts that we can say that moral judgements are mind-independently true if they represent the moral facts, it gives us no theoretical account of what could actually ground this truth. The fact that if we allow for a thin meaning of "truth", "property" and "fact" we can say that our belief is the right one, the true one, the one corresponding to the facts, and so on, is merely cosmetic. As in Ayer, what remains between us and, say, Bin Ladin, are different emotions and their superstructure. Shafer-Landau (2003) argues that

[t]he problem for non-cognitivism is that when we reach a point of citing a 'brute' desire -a want or liking that is self-standing, whose warrant derives from no other pro-attitude- then we have identified something that lacks a justifying reason, and so is arbitrary. ... Yet, basing evaluation ultimately on attitudes that are arbitrary is problematic. ... If our evaluative attitudes rely for their justification on attitudes which themselves lack justification, then

the whole network is corrupt. And the cognitivist is in better shape here because her ultimate moral commitments can avoid arbitrariness if they are true, and if she believes them because they are true. Many such commitments will fail to meet these two conditions, and this will have similarly serious consequences for the resulting network of attitudes. But if the cognitivist is correct, then we can at least aspire to avoid arbitrariness, and some of us will succeed. (p. 30)

Blackburn has used some different moves to deflect this criticism. His first strategy is to point out that relativism does not follow from his expressivism. Given Ramsay's ladder, as we have seen, the claim that all moral networks are equal is an *ethical* judgement. One that we ought not make if we are nice people. The problem with this response is that although it is true that Blackburn's staircase does not come with the instruction that we take up the attitude of approval to any alternate moral system, like, say, Bin Laden's, there is also no account given of what would make our staircase better than his: there is no account of why *our* emotional ascent is justified and not his. There is therefore reason to agree with Shafer-Landau that "relativism may be true even if no one endorses first-order relativism" (p. 26).

Blackburn's second strategy to combat the arbitrariness worry is that of giving a positive account of how we come to recognize moral errors in our moral network.

He argues that through a process reminiscent of Rawls's "reflective equilibrium" we seek to construct a network as coherent and responsive as possible to our most deeply held commitments. We can then conceive of error and rightness, deterioration and improvement, relative to what would be the perfect reflective equilibrium. The problem with this strategy is, first, that *where* the equilibrium point is depends on the starting points, and these vary between people. Relativism is the upshot. Additionally, when we criticize someone, say Bin Laden, we are not in the least concerned with his moral *consistency*! Blackburn will retort, in a Wittgensteinian spirit, that the realist falsely imagines that they can do better than the expressivist. Whether this is the case is one way of describing the topic of this dissertation. Here is, however, where we leave the quasi-realist for now.

Expressivism fails the internal accommodation because it has no account of *how* it can be that in moral matters, as in other matters of knowledge, if two sides contradict each other both can't be right. This is yet another *prima facie* reason for preferring non-naturalist realism.

2.4 Conclusion

Shafer-Landau's non-naturalism is an ambitious realism. It proposes that there is an objective truth about how to live. The main argument for non-naturalism was:

P1 There are objective facts about how to live.

P2 If naturalism were true, then there would be no objective facts about how to live.

C1 Naturalism is false

C2 Non-naturalism is true.

P1 is supported by intuition and acceptance of moral phenomenology, so called "commonsense realism. According to the realist, moral thought and discourse" essentially involves the idea that there are moral facts, these are objective categorical reasons, existing independently of the recognition of rational beings. If there are no such facts, then moral judgments are false. We know that some moral beliefs are true, so there must be moral facts. P2 is supported by the arguments against alternative views; they fail because they are either relying on hidden realist premises, or they are relativist and therefore fail to capture the authority and objectivity of morality. The moral reality they defend is not the one that commonsense

believes to be there. This is the *prima facie* case for non-naturalist realism.

Chapter 3

Supervenience and Moral Realism

As we have seen, there is a *prima facie* case for thinking that non-naturalism, to a greater extent than alternate theories, captures the objectivity supposed by moral commonsense. It says that there are good lives and bad lives, and that the wise can tell them apart. The goodness of a good life is an objective feature of it, like the roundness of a round object is an objective feature of it. A bad life is one that lacks goodness, like a square object lacks roundness. Moral error is akin to the error of thinking of a round object that it is square. The paradigm of truth appealed to in this story is straight-forwardly representational. The moral realist *detects* value. It is, in the words of Michael Levin, the paradigm of "industrial strength" truth.²⁰ But is it reasonable to think that there are non-natural moral properties and that this paradigm is the right one for ethics?

Certainly the strategy of "introducing", as they say, basic facts in order to explain how judgments can be cognitive is often unsatisfying. Consider as an illustration discourse within and about fiction. The

²⁰ Michael Levin in conversation.

realist about fiction can argue that "Sherlock Holmes lived on Baker Street" can be shown to be true if we simply "introduce" the non-natural fact that Sherlock Holmes lived on Baker Street. But most thinkers would reject this as a poor excuse of an explanation. The right hand side of the realists' schema "'P' is true iff P" purports to refer to an irreducible fiction-fact and therefore introduces a mystery rather than delivers an explanation. Promising reductive theories like Kendall Walton's (1990) "mimesis as make-believe" according to which claims in fiction are invitations to imagine that something is so-and-so in a fictional world, makes it reasonable to refuse fictions as part of our basic ontology. Consider as a further illustration, closer to the moral case, the case of female attractiveness. We should probably laugh at the proposal that our practice of attributing attractiveness to women is best explained by introducing irreducible objective attractiveness. Certainly, our imagined realist would argue, attractiveness properties have to be irreducible, since the property of being attractive does not feature in any law of physics and the term "attractive" does not mean the same as any statement concerning the physical features justifying its attribution. Angelina Jolie, according to our imagined realist, is more attractive than Barbara Bush

if, and only if, she instantiates attractiveness to a higher degree. The truth-condition is straightforward: "P is more attractive iff P has more attractiveness." Like in the case of fiction, this is obviously no enlightening explanation. Once more it introduces a mystery on the right-hand side: what is this attractiveness property? How does it relate to natural properties? Why do we admire and seek it, and how do we recognize it? We don't have to answer these questions, because we do not think that the universe houses irreducible attractiveness. Instead we can help ourselves to a promising reductive explanation like the one by evolutionary psychologist Donald Symons (1995) who speculates that:

(t)he primary determinants of female attractiveness are predicated in straightforward fashion from the perspective of the adaptationist program. [H]uman males evolved psychological mechanisms that selectively detect and respond to certain specific characteristics (such as smooth skin and bilateral symmetry) of women's bodies. These universal mechanisms were shaped by natural selection to have specific forms that they do because these forms produced reproductively functional behavior in the environments and conditions in which our ancestors evolved. (p. 80)

Assume that this is a largely correct view. We have here a response-dependent explanation of female attractiveness. No attractiveness is left hanging, as simply there, an irreducible property supervening upon the features of, for example, Angelina Jolie.

As in the case of realism about fictions and realism about attractiveness the threat against moral realism comes from a combination of the seeming mysteriousness of the moral posits, and the availability of promising reductive alternatives. A traditional anti-realist critique sees moral properties as a figment of the imagination projected on to an amoral world. Spinoza (1677/2008) for example argued that good and evil "are nothing but modes in which the imagination is affected in different ways, and, nevertheless, they are regarded by the ignorant as being specially attributes of things." Hume (1751/1983) similarly explained realism as a failure of the unreflective, the "vulgar", to recognize our mind's propensity to project itself onto the world, "gilding and staining all natural objects with colours borrowed from our internal sentiment" (p. 88). The Humean J.L Mackie (1977) is the most important recent critique of moral realism. He argued that realism introduces "qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (p. 38). Objective values (Mackie's blanket term for good, evil, right, wrong etc.) are -in the words of Mackie- "queer". They are queer Mackie thinks for primarily three reasons, all of which are different ways of posing the external accommodation challenge of placing these facts

within a natural world: first, it's hard to explain how they supervene on non-moral facts; second, it is hard to see how belief in their presence is connected to motivation (why do we care?) and practicality (how can tell us categorically what to do?); and third, it's hard to see how we could come to know about them. The queerness Mackie attributes to moral properties comes out most abruptly when we compare moral properties to shapes, the paradigm of mind-independent properties. We know of shapes by touching, seeing or feeling them, we can change and manipulate them, we can predict and calculate them. Knowing what shape something is implies no strong connection with what we like, and what we want to do, and an account of how shapes emerge and supervene arguably requires no step outside an empirical point of view.

In the next chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, we will consider Shafer-Landau's recent attempt to answer the just mentioned challenges (with the exception of the epistemological challenge) against the metaphysical credibility of objective moral properties. In chapter 4 we will consider the issue of constitution of moral properties, in chapter 5 we will discuss moral causation and in chapter 6 we will consider a comparison between moral properties and qualia. We will begin here in chapter 3 by considering Shafer-

Landau's response to the supervenience arguments against moral realism.

3.1 The Phenomenon of Moral Supervenience

Non-naturalism then is the view that moral judgments aim at representing moral facts. These facts are determined by the instantiation of moral properties. Moral properties are mind-independent, non-natural -in the sense that they are not empirically discoverable- and they provide categorical reasons for action. As we saw in chapter 1 the challenge for the non-naturalist is to show how these properties fit with our scientific worldview. Shafer-Landau's (2003) answer is that moral properties are not so different from other kinds of properties. He compares them in particular to mental properties as conceived by nonreductive models:

The sort of non-naturalism that I find appealing is one that bears a very strong structural parallel to certain non-reductive theories in the philosophy of mind. According to these latter views, mental properties are not identical to physical ones; mental facts are not physical facts; but mental facts are realized by instantiations of physical properties. At least in worlds relevantly close to ours, there would be no mental life without the physical stuff that constitutes it. This view (1) "captures our convictions about the non-identity of mental and physical properties; (2) it is not ontologically extravagant, (3) it emphasizes a supervenience relation that obtains between the mental and the physical. Each of these three features have a correlate in the moral domain. (p. 73)

The "supervenience relation" mentioned refers to the simple

truth that natural or descriptive facts determine moral facts. If there is no descriptive difference, then there is no moral difference. Nothing can change in its moral aspects without changing in its descriptive aspects. The modal force of these claims is strong: it is not merely a happenstance that they hold. It is by metaphysical necessity. If two worlds are identical in their descriptive properties, then they are identical in their moral properties. The same is true about individuals: unless there is a descriptive difference between them -including their circumstances- there is no moral difference.²¹ Richard Hare (1952), who is often credited with introducing the concept of supervenience in moral philosophy, provides a classic illustration:

...let us take that characteristic of "good" which has been called its supervenience. Suppose that we say 'St. Francis was a good man.' It is logically impossible to say this and to maintain at the same time that there might have been another man placed exactly in the same circumstances as St. Francis, and who behaved in exactly the same way, but who differed from St. Francis in this respect only, that he was not a good man. (p. 145)

Notice that for Hare it is a "logical" mistake to deny

²¹ The qualification "same circumstances" is important. Different circumstances obviously may justify different responses. For some man who donates a large sum to charity may be generous, while another man who does the same may be irresponsible if e.g. he cannot provide for himself and his family.

supervenience. If someone claims that St. Francis was good, but that someone else just like him, and in the same circumstances was not, then he is incoherent and has failed to grasp the concept of moral goodness.

Moral supervenience as well as its status as a conceptual truth is universally accepted. But behind this agreement we find important differences concerning *why* it holds. Hare, for example, believed that supervenience is part of the "grammar" of moral language. For Hare the primary function of moral language is to prescribe in accordance with the rule of "universalization" -the idea that moral prescription are made in general terms excluding proper names, pronouns, etc. This is why we cannot say that St. Francis was good, but that someone, the same as him in his general characteristics, was not good. To say this would be to fail to make a coherent moral judgment. Supervenience, Hare (1993) wrote, "is simply, under another name, one of the main constituents of our old friend universalizability" (p. 68). For the expressivists supervenience is likewise implied by what they take to be the (non-descriptive) function of moralizing. One of its prominent advocates, Allan Gibbard, holds that moralizing is essentially concerned with planning responses to

contingencies understood in descriptive terms. This could only succeed if supervenience is respected. If you plan to help a stranger in need, or recommend that we help strangers in need, then you cannot also at the same time plan to not help a stranger in need or recommend that we do not help a stranger. For the classical naturalist realist, supervenience follows from the fact that the moral *is* the natural. If moral facts are natural facts, then two worlds identical in all their natural facts will necessarily be identical in their moral facts. For the just mentioned thinkers, supervenience is, what Robert Stalnaker calls, "Humean supervenience". Stalnaker (1996) writes:

To say that the A-properties or facts are supervenient on the B-properties or facts is to say that the A-properties are, in a sense, redundant, since they are already implicitly specified when one has specified all the B-facts. A-facts are not facts "over and above" the B-facts, not something "separate." To state an A-fact, or ascribe an A-property, is to describe the same reality in a different way, at a different level of abstraction, by carving the world at different joints. To borrow a metaphor from Saul Kripke, if all the facts are supervenient on B-facts, then God, when he creates the world, is finished when he has determined all the B-properties of things. It is not that others -God's apprentices perhaps- fill in the picture by adding A-properties. There is nothing more to be done. (p. 222)

That is, whether they chose to "emphasize" supervenience or not, the above mentioned views (Hare, Gibbard, the moral naturalists) all understand supervenience as compatible

with broad naturalism, the view that, in the final analysis, when properties have been distinguished from predicates, and our perspectives have been abstracted from what is really there, the supervenient is not a world existing in addition to the physical world. The truth makers of biological, historical, meteorological and other facts are not irreducible biological, historical and meteorological facts, but the same very same facts as those described by physics. There are many "vocabularies", but there is but one world, and it is physical. The nonnaturalist's understanding of supervenience differs from these accounts in that she conceives of it as a metaphysical relationship between two kinds of distinct, mind-independent properties. This, many have thought, creates a problem.

3.2 The Supervenience Arguments against Moral Realism

The problem is, in essence, the following: if the moral and the natural properties are distinct, then *why* can there not be worlds that are identical in their natural properties, yet different in their moral aspects? This was one of the main reasons that Mackie (1977) thought that

moral properties are queer. Mackie argued that

a way of bringing out the queerness is to ask, about anything that is supposed to have some objective moral quality, how is this linked to the natural features? What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty -say, causing pain just for fun- and the moral fact that it is wrong? It cannot be an entailment, a logical or semantic necessity. Yet it is not merely that the two features appear together. The wrongness must somehow be 'consequential' or 'supervenient': it is wrong because it is a piece of deliberate cruelty. But just what in the world is signified by this 'because'? ... The intuition required might be the perception that wrongness is a higher order property belonging to certain natural properties but what is this belonging of properties to other properties and how can we discern it? (p. 41)

This argument has different strands. One strand presses the nonnaturalist for an account of why certain non-moral facts realize the moral facts they do. Shafer-Landau takes the only line possible for the nonnaturalist on this issue. For the non-naturalist, he argues, there is no theoretical answer to this question. These relations are metaphysically *fundamental* and it is the business of first-order moralizing to discover them. That is all that can be said. Pressing the nonnaturalist for an *explanation* of particular moral-descriptive property relations is mere question-begging, since it assumes that such relations are *not* fundamental.

There are however, ways of pressing the supervenience

argument against the nonnaturalist, which Shafer-Landau does not consider to be question-begging. In *Moral Realism* he responds to Blackburn's well-known version of the argument. Blackburn describes the problem for the realist as one of reconciling the following two claims:

The Moral Supervenience Thesis

(S) As matter of conceptual necessity moral properties supervene on non-moral properties.

The Non-Entailment Thesis

(E) There is no moral proposition whose truth is *logically* entailed by any propositions ascribing naturalistic properties to its subject.

The problem for the nonnaturalist is that she lacks an explanation of *why*, given (E), (S) would hold. Blackburn (1993) writes:

Imagine a thing A, which has a certain set of naturalistic properties and relations. A also has a certain degree of moral worth; say it's very good. This according to the realist reports a certain state of affairs: A's goodness. Now the existence of this state of affairs is not logically entailed by A being as it is in all naturalistic respects ... That is, it is logically possible that A should be as it is in all naturalistic aspects, yet this further state of affairs not exist. But if it is a logical possibility that A be as it is in all naturalistic respects, and

not be good, why isn't it a logical possibility that A remain in all naturalistic respects as it was when it was good, and yet cease to be good? (p. 119)

Blackburn can be seen as making two related but distinct points.

First, he is asking the realist to explain why on his model it is a conceptual/logical error to violate supervenience. If moral properties are distinct from natural properties, and moral concepts are distinct from natural concepts, then why would it be *incoherent* to say that something x is good, but that something exactly like it in its natural properties is not good? Second, he is asking for an explanation of why, given the realist model, and the lack of logical entailment, we have reason to think that supervenience holds. What, in other words, is the explanation for *realist* supervenience?

3.3 Shafer-Landau's Constitution Response to Blackburn's Supervenience Argument

In *Moral Realism* Shafer-Landau (2003) argues that the nonnaturalist can use the idea of constitution to explain supervenience. He writes:

We can explain the supervenience of a property S on a property B* if we can correctly claim that B* constitutes S... and since that constitution account is the very same as that relied upon by those who defend structurally similar non-reductive views about the mind, or mid-sized physical objects, we have good reason to think that there is a parity between the moral case and the that of other recognizably realistic domains. (p. 88)

Shafer-Landau believes that mental supervenience is similar to moral supervenience in the following respect: there are no logical links between the mental and the physical, still given that a certain physical property underlies a mental property it must (in that world) always do so. In other words, as far as thought and language is concerned there could be a world where what actually underlies a mental property fails to do so; nevertheless, once a certain physical property, underlies a certain mental property, then it does so in every metaphysically possible world. This Shafer-Landau believes to be an instance of what he takes to be the conceptual truth that:

- (A) If any grouping of base properties B* constitute property S, then anything else that is B* must (metaphysical necessity) be S.

Shafer-Landau argues that Blackburn's argument rests on the mistaken idea that, in the absence of logical entailments between A properties and B properties, we need

to explain why supervenience holds. But, he argues, there really is no 'problem with mixed worlds'.

The fact is that we can logically conceive of a world in which the base properties that actually underlie particular moral ones fail to do so. But there is no mystery here, since people can conceive of many things that are not metaphysically possible. (p. 86)

Blackburn's argument, if correct, would, according to Shafer-Landau, have the absurd implication that we should be antirealists about every area where we have a combination of absence of logical ties between the related properties, and supervenience. Shafer-Landau argues:

If this difficulty is sufficient to create a case against a realistic interpretation of the relevant domain, then we should be anti-realists about chemical facts, mental states, colors, etc.; all should be expunged from our ontology, and explained as a matter of projection. (p. 87)

In fact, Shafer-Landau continues, supervenience is a conceptual truth and most such truth need no explanation. Moral supervenience is self-evident, it is simply, he argues, an "instance of Leibniz Law of indiscernibles".

3.4 Evaluating Shafer-Landau's Responses to Blackburn's Supervenience Argument

First, Shafer-Landau's constitution account cannot explain the conceptual nature of moral supervenience. The fact that it is possible to hold that the mental is constituted by the physical, while also admitting that, as far as the concept of the mental is concerned, it is possible to imagine that it does not supervene, proves that the constitution claim itself does not imply supervenience as a conceptual truth. A belief in Cartesian souls, or in Zombies, may be factually incorrect, but it is not incoherent. This means that the supervenience problem for moral realism is not necessarily a problem for all combinations of supervenience and failure of logical entailment. The problem for the realist is that moral supervenience holds as a conceptual truth, when, it would seem, on his model, it should not hold as a conceptual truth. That is, if moral and descriptive properties are distinct, then why would it be incoherent to imagine failures of supervenience?

There is no analogous problem with, say, mental

properties, because, as pointed out earlier, it isn't incoherent to imagine failure of supervenience. The supervenience argument against nonreductive moral realism therefore does not prove too much. Second, the appeal to Leibniz Law is spurious. Leibniz Law says that if two things share all properties then they are identical. But this does not bear on supervenience. If someone has *all* the same properties as S:t Francis, then, according to Leibniz's Law, he is S:t Francis. But so what? It does not follow from Leibniz Law that someone like S:t Francis in his non-moral aspects, must share his virtues. Blackburn is asking for a reason to think that two objects with the same *descriptive* properties are indiscernible in their moral properties. Leibniz Law, for all its self-evidence, is not this reason. In sum: moral supervenience is a conceptual truth, and nonnaturalism cannot account for this fact.

Constitution may however imply supervenience as a *metaphysical* truth as stated by (A). Consider Shafer-Landau's (2003) concrete example of *moral* constitution:

Jane gives a great deal of her money to the Special Olympics. She doesn't give so much as to become impoverished, but enough so that she has to forgo many things she would dearly like to have. She gives because she is so touched by their efforts of the Special Olympians and the commitment of the volunteers who aid them. And she gives anonymously. She isn't

looking to be recognized for her generosity. (p. 74) ... There is *nothing* to a case of generosity, or viciousness, or dutiful action, other than the natural features that constitute such properties. Something exemplifies a moral property entirely in virtue of possessing certain natural features. (p. 75)

First a clarification. The two sentences in the last paragraph seem to contain two different understandings of constitution/realization. The first sentence says that moral properties are constituted by natural properties (features). This is a problematic claim. There is no universally agreed upon understanding of what "property" means, but properties are usually thought to be capable of instantiation, while also existing independently of any instantiation. The same property can be instantiated in different individuals or not at all. So two distinct things can, say, both be yellow and round, while the property of being yellow and the property of being round exist independently of these two things or any things. Now, can it really be the case that roundness and yellowness are constituted by physical properties? This seems like a category error. Can the nonnaturalist's claim really be that generosity itself, the *property*, is constituted by nothing but some "natural features"? This seems like a category error and a betrayal of nonnaturalism to boot. The second sentence avoids this paradox by speaking not of

properties, but of property exemplifications. It is not the property of generosity itself that is constituted by natural features, but rather particular instantiations of generosity are constituted, exhaustively, of instances of natural properties. Let us then assume that this is the view behind the various formulations.²²

Constitution does seem to imply supervenience. Jane's generosity is the instantiation of the higher order natural features of her acts: that it was motivated by altruism, that it was giving more than required, and that it did not overextend her. Now, consider Tim, who also gives more than required, and is also motivated by altruism, and is also not overextended. If there is nothing to an instance of generosity than the just mentioned instances of natural features, then how could Tim's action fail to be generous?

²² It is perhaps worth pointing out that one way of defending moral properties as irreducible, is to be Platonist about them. Plato held that things derived their nature from participating in ideas or forms existing outside time and space. Something is square if it participates in squareness, and something is good if it participate in goodness or, simply, the Good. Shafer-Landau, as most contemporary non-naturalists, do not rest their rejection of naturalism on the defense of a supersensible and supremely real world of Ideas existing in another dimension. Shafer-Landau's "exhaustive realization" model of "properties" is an alternative to Platonism.

The problem for Shafer-Landau is that it is not clear that this metaphysical model is compatible with nonnaturalism. Presumably the moral property involved is not Jane's kindhearted giving, but the goodness of this action. Our commitment to the goodness of generous actions is justified because the principle is true. It is true because it represents an objective relationship between kindhearted giving etc. and goodness. The relationship between moral and non-moral properties serve as truth-makers of proposed moral generalizations/principles. But if in each instance of kindhearted giving there are "nothing... other than" instances of kindheartness, giving to someone, exceeding requirements, etc. then where is this goodness? How are we supposed to "check" our belief that generosity is good, against the fact that each case is nothing but a case of kindhearted giving etc.? How can we recognize goodness in an action, if we are only presented with instances of natural properties? If Hume's Law is correct, as supposed by nonnaturalists, then we cannot. (And would we not be attributing something to the situation that was not really there?)

So, it would seem that, on a natural reading, Shafer-Landau's constitution account implies supervenience, but at

the cost of eliminating the moral property instance or identifying it with instances of higher-level natural properties. It is of course crucial for the nonnaturalist that constitution is *not* identity: that the constituted moral property instance, is not its realizer property instance/s, but something distinct. Shafer-Landau recognizes this, and abandons (A), arguing that a B-property can constitute an A-property, while at some other time not do so. Using the example of pain he suggests that we can hold that the firing of c-fibers constitute pain in man while "some beings have c-fiber firings *without* experiencing pain". This move preserves the distinctness of pain and c-fiber firings. If two instances of c-fiber firings can differ in respect of being instances of pain—one is, the other isn't—then an instance of pain is not the same as an instance of c-fiber firings. Of course there is a price to pay here. This understanding of constitution, assuming for the moment that it is coherent, does not imply supervenience. The supervenience problem reappears as the problem of explaining why, if the constituted property instance is distinct from its constituents, and there are no logical ties between them, there cannot be violations of supervenience. In "Replies to Critics" (2005) Shafer-Landau abandons the strategy of

explaining supervenience by constitution, admitting that this notion is "not well-suited to do the needed explaining" (p. 313).

This supervenience-violating conception of constitution is also problematic because of the strong dualism it seems to imply. For imagine if there really is *nothing* to pain but c-fiber firing, *how* could there be c-fiber firing and not pain? The failure of a non-human being to experience pain, despite being in a state of having c-fibers firing, is better interpreted as showing that c-fiber firings in fact do not *exhaustively* constitute pain in man. Some additional condition besides c-fiber firings must have been present in the case of the man, and absent in the case of the non-human being, meaning that c-fiber firings only *partially* constitutes the experience of pain. To make the same point in the case of ethics: if *all* there is to the wrongness of Tom's theft is that it was against the law, then how can we hold that Gill's theft, also against the law, was not wrong? We can only do so if we point to some difference between the thefts. Say that Jill's theft was against the law, but that it was necessary to preserve her life. This implies the falsehood of the claim that all there was to the wrongness of Tom's theft

was that it was against the law: it was against the law and it was not necessary to preserve his life. And so on. If, say, these two conditions were jointly sufficient for the wrongness of theft, then to think that they be present in two different actions, while also holding that one action is wrong and the other not, seems incoherent. Only a strong, strange, dualism would allow for such a situation.

We can conclude that the fact of supervenience is a *challenge* to non-reductive views rather than a persuasive *answer* to critics. Before further questioning the *coherence* of this non-reductive (supervenience violating) understanding of realization in the next part (Part II), let's take stock of Shafer-Landau's responses to Blackburn's supervenience challenges:

Blackburn:

- What makes some natural properties realize moral properties?

Shafer-Landau:

- They just do.

Blackburn:

- Why is it incoherent to violate supervenience in the moral case and not, for example, the mental case?

Shafer-Landau:

- That's just how it is with moral thought and language.

Blackburn:

- Why must a certain concatenation of natural properties that constitute a certain moral property, always do so if they are distinct and objective entities?

Shafer-Landau:

- It's self-evident. That is how it is, and no explanation is needed.

Shafer-Landau and Blackburn then, in the end, agree: nonnaturalism cannot explain moral supervenience. Of course, there is a disagreement about whether this is a good reason for rejecting nonnaturalist realism. We could reasonably conclude that anti-realism has an advantage when it comes to the issue of moral supervenience since it is a strength of a theory if it implies the phenomena to be explained (indeed what else is explanation?) and a weakness if it does not. It should also be remembered that, in any

case, supervenience is not an answer to what it means for moral properties to "tell us what to do" nor an explanation of why they have the peculiar connection to motivation that all agree that they do.

Next we will see that the view that the supervening property instance is a distinct, irreducible addition to the world of physical facts may be an incoherent, or/and mysteriously dualist view. It will be argued that constitution and its cousin realization are properly viewed as parts of a reductive agenda.

Chapter 4

Realization Entails Reduction

Shafer-Landau allies himself with non-reductivism in philosophy of mind. In particular with realization physicalism: the view that mental types are not identical to physical types, but that they are exhaustively realized by tokens of physical types. Like these non-reductivists, he hopes to have the best of both worlds: irreducibility and physicalist respectability. It is in this sense a form of compatibilism. There are however reasons to question the coherence of this position. It has been called a way of having your cake and eating it to, and a free lunch. (Thomas Polger 2007; Jaegwon Kim 1992) Yet others see it as the "re-emergence of uniformed dualism" (Andrew Bickle, 2003). These skeptics are right. The idea of reduction shared by Shafer-Landau and his non-reductive friends in the philosophy of mind is flawed. It fails to specify either sufficient or necessary condition for what we intuitively take to be reduction. An alternative, better, view of reduction sees realization as the key to reduction/as constituting reduction. Andrew Melnyk's "core-reduction" will be considered as a promising version of this view.

4.1 Shafer-Landau's Arguments against the Reduction of Supervenient Moral Properties

Shafer-Landau believes that realization metaphysics can show us how there can be irreducible *sui generis* moral properties. The moral may be realized by the descriptive, but it nevertheless enjoys a certain autonomy. This autonomy is conceptual and linguistic: moral thought and moral language "cannot be given a naturalistic analysis" (p. 66), as well as ontological: "moral properties are not identical to those that figure centrally in the theories of other disciplines" (p. 72). The proposition that moral thought and language as well as its facts and properties are autonomous is -Shafer-Landau wants us to believe- quite unexceptional.

This sort of distinctness is what is alleged for any two sets of facts whose correlative properties are not identical to one another. Biological facts, chess facts, and historical facts are all of a kind different from physical facts. Some of these facts are embeddable in laws and generalizations that cannot be captured in purely physical terms. The language used to correctly characterize such facts conveys information that cannot be brought out by physics. It is a fact, surely, that human organisms require blood for their survival, a fact that cats have paws, and a fact that Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. These facts are not mentioned in the physics texts or journals, because physics hasn't the language to do so. It lacks this language because the facts just referred to represent the exemplification of non-physical properties, i.e. features that play no role whatever in developed

physical theories. (p. 73)

The comparison to other disciplines is made as an argument from innocence by association/companions in innocence. If we have no qualms about recognizing the irreducibility of the above mentioned facts, then we should have no qualms about accepting a world of *sui generis* moral facts. One of Shafer-Landau's arguments in favor of the proposition that the facts of biology, chess, history and psychology "represent the exemplification of non-physical properties" is that "the terms that designate these properties do not, after investigation, appear to be synonymous..." (p. 73). The obvious problem with this argument is that not even the paradigmatic cases of reduction satisfy the synonymy requirement. Salt, science tells us is NaCl, but "salt" is not synonymous with "NaCl". Water, science tells us, is H₂O, but "h₂o" is not, synonymous with "water". And so on. Lack of synonymy, in short, is compatible with the strongest form of reduction.²³ Shafer-Landau recognizes that synonymy is not a necessary condition for reduction, but he believes that non-synonymy "puts the burden of proof on those who would advance an identity thesis." In the case of salt/NaCl and water/h₂O,

²³ Reduction as a project of translation is generally resisted. (Melnik 2003, 77)

it was discovered *a posteriori* that these terms were speaking of the same thing *despite* the lack of synonymy.

Shafer-Landau's more important argument in favor of irreducible non-physical properties is the notion that properties like being a chess piece or needing blood, seem to be physically realizable in a multitude of ways, thus precluding any *a posteriori* identities like that of salt = NaCl. This is the familiar argument from multiple realizability (MR). MR was introduced by Hilary Putnam (1967) in the 1960's to argue against the view that every mental kind is identical to some state of the brain/neural kind. Putnam held that it is implausible to suppose that a thought or a feeling would be the same neural type in all humans, and in all other animals. In fact, Putnam argued, it is possible that some alien species with a physical constitution very different from ours could have thoughts and feelings. We should therefore not think of the mental in terms of its particular, neural realization. Rather, we should think of the mind as analogous to the software of a computer. The same software can run on different models made of different components, and, importantly, we can learn about the software without any significant knowledge of the hardware realizing it/implementing it. If a type of

mental state is multiply realizable then it cannot be identified with some particular type of physical state, hence there can be no *a posteriori* type identities. Jerry Fodor extends this picture to other "higher-level" properties, arguing that there are properties, patterns and laws that are physically multiply realizable, and that they are therefore the irreducible subject matter of the so-called special sciences. Fodor (1974) writes:

The reason it is unlikely that every kind corresponds to a physical kind is just that (a) interesting generalizations (e.g. counterfactual supporting generalizations) can often be made about events whose physical descriptions have nothing in common; (b) it is often the case that whether the physical descriptions of the events subsumed by such generalizations have anything in common is, in an obvious sense, entirely irrelevant to the truth of the generalization, or to their interestingness, or to their degree of confirmation, or, indeed, to any of their epistemologically important properties; and (c) the special sciences are very much in the business of formulating generalizations of this kind. (p. 124)

As an example, he mentions monetary exchanges: "Some monetary exchanges involve strings of wampum. Some involve dollar bills. And some involve signing one's name on a check" (p. 124). The many different ways of realizing monetary exchanges makes it impossible to study it on a reduced, physical level: the laws and kinds of economics will be unrecognizable from the point of view of physics. All the same, it is possible that each particular monetary

exchange is physical. This view is therefore known as functionalism with token physicalism.²⁴

4.2 Evaluating the Arguments against Reduction

Shafer-Landau cannot draw on the perceived success of non-reductive physicalism. To begin with there is the obvious difference between nonnatural moral properties and other higher-order properties. The properties whose autonomy defended by Putnam and Fodor are not solely graspable *a priori*, nor do they "tell us what to do". In fact, Putnam is an anti-realist about ethics, arguing for ethical "objectivity *without* objects" (2005). Indeed the directiveness of alleged moral properties has been considered sufficient reason for a Humean denial their existence. But even if we were to assume that there is

²⁴Functionalism is naturally understood as a view about the nature of mental properties, and says that mental properties are functional, i.e., perhaps, somehow definable in terms of typical causes and effects. Such a view doesn't entail any form of physicalism, because conceivably the realizing properties, those that have so-and-so causes and such-and-such effects, could be immaterial. Token physicalism says that every token, or mental token, is one and the same as some physical token. Putnam and Fodor endorsed both functionalism and token physicalism, but they're still distinct views. (Davidson was a token physicalist but not a functionalist.)

enough of a similarity between moral and higher-order physical properties to make a comparison valid, we must surely wonder how a version of physicalism, albeit a property pluralist version, can be understood as a suitable model for moral nonnaturalism!

The view that I will defend is that the sense in which other vocabularies and other ontologies are autonomous or irreducible, does not preclude reduction in another more important sense. The argument will be:

- 1) It is not obvious that mental properties/types are multiply realizable (MR). They may be. And some moral properties are. So there is a case for MR.
- 2) MR is incompatible with type-type reduction. But this is not the only way (and not the best way) to understand reduction.
- 3) There is a promising way of understanding reduction in terms of realization. This view is compatible with MR. The essence of real reduction is a commitment to explanation within the bounds of a One World metaphysics: the idea that different frameworks may speak of the same facts, rather than each framework having its own ontology of facts (other than in a

thin, non-literal sense).

- 4) Real reduction is compatible with various anti-reductionist and "autonomy of the higher-order properties" claims. There can therefore be a reductionist/anti-reductionist reconciliation.
- 5) Nonnaturalism, however, is not benefitted by this conciliation, because it necessarily has to conceive of moral properties as truthmakers in a strong nonreductive sense.
- 6) Realization is unsuitable for nonnaturalism, because, when properly understood, it is sufficient for reduction.

(a) 4.3 Are mental properties MR?

(b) Shafer-Landau (2003) thinks that the multiple realizability of the mental is a safe assumption:

[T]he multiple realizability of mental properties has seemed about as obvious as anything in this realm of philosophy. Being puzzled, or puzzled at the ways of love; thinking, or thinking about why bluejays are blue... it seems very plausible to suppose that each of these mental properties can be realized by instantiations of physical properties other than the ones that actually constitute them in a given

instance. (p. 73)

There are reasons to question this dogma. First a methodological point. The mere conceptual possibility that some mental state could be realized by other ones than the ones that actually constitute them, is not sufficient to show that it could be so realized. It is conceptually possible to think that salt is not NaCl, but, as a matter of fact, it is NaCl, and there is no other way to be salt other than to be NaCl. Similarly, it is conceptually possible that a teacup can feel pain, but, as a matter of fact, it can't. The MR hypothesis should be supported by empirical evidence not mere fancy. Hence, we must get up from our armchairs.

MR has been used to argue that neuroscience will not be able to give a theory of the mind. There is in fact evidence from neuroscience *against* the MR hypothesis. John Bickle (2003) argues that if the mental were MR then neuroscience would be impossible. It is not impossible, so the mental is not MR in any radical sense. As one of many illustrations, Bickle (2005) asks us to consider the following neuroscientific result:

- (c) Using delayed response paradigms [Patricia Goldman-Rakic and collaborators] discovered a variety of neurons in prefrontal cortex whose action potential

frequency increases only during the delay period of working memory tasks and is specific to the stimulus being remembered. This activity increase varies with the length of the delay period employed but has an upper limit of about 20 seconds - similar to the temporal flexibility and upper limits on working memory measured behaviorally by psychologists. (p. 235)

(d) It is, Bickle argues, in the final analysis, the activity of the neurons, and nothing else, that psychologists are measuring when they study the memory, albeit from the point of view of a different theoretical framework than neuroscience.

(e) There is also the different issue of how to individuate mental states. Nick Zangwill (1992) argues that there is no good reason for thinking that there would be enough in common between mental states belonging to different species, to label them as being of the *same* type. If the hardware is radically different, then perhaps the best hypothesis is that we are not dealing with just another instance of exactly the same type of mental state. We are talking about different types of states rather than the same type differently realized.

(f) It is not obvious how to understand MR - what should count as a *difference* in realization? Surely every instance of a property should not count as a "variation" in

realization. Lawrence Shapiro (2000) asks us to consider two corkscrews: if one is blue and the other black, would that constitute MR? Of course not. If one is made of aluminum, and the other steel, would that constitute MR? No, thinks Shapiro: "steel and aluminum are not different realizations of a waiter's corkscrew because, relative to the properties that make them suitable for removing corks, they are identical" (p. 644). Relevant MR must, according to Shapiro, be a case where two objects perform the same task, but in very different ways. Like the difference between a waiter's corkscrew and a hydraulic corkscrew. But, now, Shapiro argues, the MR proponent is faced with a dilemma: because it is not obvious that we should count waiter's corkscrews and hydraulic corkscrews to be of the same type. This would be true only, as argued by Nick Zangwill, on the "grossest" level of description. On the other hand if we do see them as being different types, then we do not have an instance of MR. In short, Zangwill and Shapiro argue that it is harder to be MR, than what we might initially suppose.

(g) What is the lesson here? The lesson is that the MR of the mental is not beyond doubt. Type reduction is still on the table. The non-reductive hypothesis might turn

out to be false, so even if moral properties are relevantly similar to mental properties, this is not an "obvious" route to irreducibility. Notwithstanding, even if *mental* properties may turn out to be less MR than we thought, it may still be the case that the properties of economics, and biology etc. are not type reducible and that moral properties are in this respect more like these properties than they are like mental properties. As Zangwill and Shapiro argue, this also hinges on what we take to be a relevant difference in realization, and how we identify types. If we turn directly to the moral case, and consider here Shafer-Landau's own example of generosity, it is not so obvious that it is MR. We take the definition to be "benevolent giving beyond expectations" then certainly every token will be different in some respect: someone could be just like Jane, but be a brunette, or donate to the standard Olympics, or perhaps give her time rather than money, or... so, yes, many things done by many different people, in many different situations have all been generous. But this may be similar to the blue and the black corkscrew. That is, these differences should not count as a significant case for the MR of generosity. Perhaps the question should be: are there other ways of being generous than to, minimally, instantiate benevolent giving beyond

expectation? Then the answer is, arguably, no.

(h) The example of Jane, as remarked earlier, is misleading, since what is at issue is not whether her action was generous, but whether it was good, or right (to-be-done) and, in general, whether the general rule that generous actions are good is true. It is obviously a moral fact of sorts that generous acts have these core descriptive characteristics, but this is not the moral fact at issue: we are after the "goodness" fact and the "oughtness" fact. Now, are "oughtness" and "goodness" realizable in a multitude of ways? We should probably agree with Shafer-Landau that the naturalist who thinks that for example "the right action" tracks only one higher-order natural property, for example, the maximization of pleasure, is mistaken. As argued by Shafer-Landau (and before him Ross) sometimes maximizing pleasure is sufficient, in other cases it is not sufficient for rightness. One action may, for example, be right because it maximizes pleasure, another because it respects a promise while also bringing about the *least* amount of pleasure of the available alternatives. This is different from generosity where "giving benevolently beyond expectation" are arguably both necessary and sufficient conditions. So,

although it is not obvious that the mental is MR, it is plausible that the moral is. Let us assume that the moral is MR.

(i) 4.4 The Received view of Reduction is Flawed

(j) Assuming that a property is physically multiply realizable, does this mean that is it irreducible? This depends on what reduction is. Shafer-Landau understands reduction in the following way:

The existence of reductive necessary and sufficient conditions for moral properties... specify a criterion of necessary co-extension: necessarily, if property M is instantiated, so too is property N, and, necessarily, if N is instantiated, so too is M. (p. 74)

This view, the view that reduction requires "a criterion of necessary co-extension", is in essence a common interpretation of Ernest Nagel's influential "bridge-law" model of inter-theoretic reduction.²⁵ It is what Andrew

²⁵ What necessity are we talking about? Shafer-Landau intends metaphysical necessity. Nagel may not have recognized this form, so his formulation intends nomological necessity. I think that it is still possible to

Melnyk (2003) describes as the "received view":

Reductionism in the received sense about a theory, T1, is the claim that T1 is reducible to some theory, T2, in the sense that the law statements of T1 are deducible from the law statements that assert the identity of every T1 type with some or other T2-type. (p.77)

What Nagel-reduction/the received view requires is that types of T2 are lawfully connected to types of T1. If there is a reduction then there are true bi-conditionals of the form M if N, N if M. But this assumption is questionable. Jaegwon Kim has proposed that reduction is possible despite multiple realization, if we simply localize the reduction base appropriately. Pain may have a certain neurological profile in humans and another in a different biological system. So, for example, we would get bridge-laws of the form; if x is human, then x is in pain, iff N. And even if it would turn out that pain is differently realized in different humans, or even differently in the same human, we could always, in principle, see it as reduced to the very

understand Shafer-Landau's understanding of reduction is akin to Nagel-reduction. (I am grateful for Stalnaker pointing this out to me.) A second point: Robert Richardson (1979) is one of many commentators who have pointed out that Nagel himself seemed to have thought that one-way conditionals rather than the stringent biconditionals be sufficient for reduction if there is an explanation of the higher order properties and laws in terms of lower-level properties and laws. The point here is that Shafer-Landau is following a common understanding associated with Nagel. I owe this clarification to Michael Levin.

neurological state serving as its realizer. Kim (2000) argues that even if there were variations in realization between individuals, "there still would be structure specific biconditional laws ... and there still would be perfectly good local reductions, even if they are only for single individuals at a particular moment of their lives" (p. 94).

(k) *Kim's important and fundamental point is that whether there are such biconditional or not, is actually philosophically irrelevant, because the received view /Nagel-reduction fails to express the essential motivations behind reductionism. Kim writes,*

It is arguably analytic that reductions must simplify; reductions must reduce. We expect our reductions to yield simpler systems -a simpler system of concepts, or simpler system of assumptions or simpler system of entities. On this score bridge -laws of the form M iff P apparently are wanting in different ways. Since M iff P is supposed to be a contingent law, the concepts of M and P remain distinct; hence bridge laws yield no conceptual simplification. Further, since we have only a contingent biconditional "iff" connecting properties M and P, M and P remain distinct properties and there is no ontological simplification. ... In any case the metaphysically significant fact is that Nagel reduction gives us no ontological simplification, and fails to give meaning to the intuitive "nothing over and above" that we rightly associate with reduction. (p. 97)

Bridge-laws in short are insufficient for reduction because they do not themselves explain why they hold in a way which gives us a simplification. To illustrate: if God creates a

certain mental event, every time that he also creates a different neural event, then this would suffice for the truth of bridge-law. But, this, occasionalism as it's called, is obviously not sufficient for reduction as we intuitively think of it. Kim concludes,

[T]he question of whether or not mentality is Nagel-reducible via bridge laws to the physical cannot be a significant metaphysical issue. Nor can a refutation of reductionism that is premised on Nagelian reduction be considered a significant philosophical contribution. (p. 97)

That is: even if there are no biconditional between mental and physical types or moral and descriptive types, there may still be reduction, and even if there were such laws, they would not be sufficient for reduction. In fact, as an illustration of the latter, consider Sidgwick's identification of intrinsic good with pleasure. His view was not that pleasure and goodness were the same property, but that only pleasure was good ("had the property of being good"). This raises the question: what is *real* reduction?

4.5 Better views of reduction: Reduction as realization

Kim's alternative view of reduction is the functional model/realization model. To be reductive in an interesting

sense, bridge-laws must be seen as describing identities. If $M \text{ iff } N$, is true because $M = N$, then the necessity is explained, and the ontology is simplified. The identity answer is hence truly reductive. Kim enlist the functional model of Fodor's anti-reductivism to serve the opposite reductive purpose by requiring that a reduced property be functionalizable. If we can define being M , as having such and such consequences, then we can identify the M with whatever has those consequences, with whatever occupies the role. Kim offers the following illustrations: heat is molecular motion, and the gene is a DNA molecule. Heat does such and such... H' , and molecular motion is what fills the role specified by H' , and so molecular motion is heat. The gene does such and such... H' the DNA satisfies H' , and so the Gene is DNA.

Fine, but doesn't the MR problem for reduction show up here? What if more than one lower-level reducer kind, can fill the role? In that case you would not have identifications like those of heat, DNA, salt and water! If, say, three distinct types of neural states: N_h and N_r and N_m , can realize a mental state M , then M is not identical to one particular neural state. Indeed, this is why functionalism is thought to be a non-reductive position

by Putnam and Fodor. Kim's answer is that we identify M with the property of being in some realizer state. Kim illustrates this point with the example of pain. If we seek a reductive account we must first functionalize it: something is pain, if H. We then can find out that the neural states N_h , N_r , and N_m realize the functional role H. Pain is a neural property, because it is the property of being in either of three neural states. We can now say that pain is nothing over and above being in neural state N_h or N_r or N_m . Kim (1993) explains:

the property of having property P is exactly identical with P, and the property of having one of the properties, P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n , is exactly identical with the disjunctive property, $P_1 \vee P_2 \vee \dots \vee P_n$. On the assumption that N_h, N_r and N_m are all the properties satisfying specification H, the property of having a property with H, namely pain, is none other than the property of having either N_h or N_r or N_m - namely, the disjunctive property, $N_h \vee N_r \vee N_m$! (pp. 323-4)

This means that variable realization is not a threat to reduction. We can simply identify any higher-order property, M, with the property of being in any of its realizer states.

4.6 Core-reduction: An even better view of realization as reduction

Kim is right about the poverty of Nagel-reduction, and about the irrelevance of MR to the issue of reduction, and mostly right about the functionalize-to-reduce doctrine. There is a wrinkle, and it is that it seems wrong to identify the functional property with a disjunction of its realizer states. It is wrong because there can be future realizations involving different realizer states, and it is wrong because it does not seem to be essential to the property that it is realized by the particular states that it is realized by. -Couldn't the disjunction include future realizers too? Well, Kim is right in that a timeless account of some functional property will at no point require anything pointing to anything in addition to all the real-izer instances. But what is essential to the functional property is exactly the function which allows these instances to be classified as belonging together. Since "pain" is a hard case, consider as an illustration the property of being a corkscrew. It is not part of its "essence" that it is realized in a certain way, say physically, and it would be wrongheaded to say that to be a corkscrew is to be either of its actualizations,

rather, it is part of its essence, its identity, to be something that can remove corks from bottles, and is made with this purpose in mind. Let us therefore consider Andrew Melnyk's "core-reduction", arguably the best worked out view of realization-as-reduction, or "realization physicalism". *Realization physicalism is described by Melnyk as a generalization of psychofunctionalism*, the view that mental properties are to be identified, not, as argued by Kim, with the physical stuff realizing them, but with the property of having a property playing some particular role. Melnyk (2003) defines realization physicalism (R) in the following way:

(R) Every property instance is either an instance of a physical property or a physically realized instance of some functional property; every object is either an object of some physical object kind or physically realized object of some functional object kind; every event is either an event of some physical kind or a physically realized event of some functional event kind. (p. 83)

In Melnyk's view realization physicalism R, implies core-reduction(CR):

(CR) All nomic special and honorary scientific facts and all positive nonnomic special and honorary scientific facts, have an explanation that appeals only to (i) physical facts and (ii) necessary (i.e. entirely noncontingent) truths. (p. 83)

(CR) is different from the received view, in that it denies

as necessary conditions for reduction a) that special laws be derivable from physical laws (plus necessary identities) and b) that there be a posteriori necessary identities between special scientific types and physical types. These are -here is in agreement with Kim- "needlessly strong requirements." There need be no type-type identity, but only token identities, and bridge-laws between "every special or honorary scientific type, on the one hand, and some or other functional type on the other" (p. 85). (R) implies (CR) in Melnyk's view because: 1) If (R) is true, then we can *in principle* derive every proposition asserting the existence of one of the special -and honorary-science tokens that actually exists, and every proposition asserting the holding of an instance of a special-and honorary science regularity from physical facts (plus nec. truths like the functionalization). 2) Derivability equals explainability. 3) The explainability satisfies the conditions for (CR). Therefore: If (R) then (CR).

To illustrate: the essence of a can-opener (Melnyk's own example) is given by a functional description F, (R) says that for an instantiation of F there is some physical P an instance of which realizes F, this means that P's presence explains why there is a can-opener. Melnyk writes:

Why is there a can opener there? Well, there's a swarm of physical particles there that plays the can opener role, and all it takes for there to be a can opener there is that something there should play the can opener role. ... [G]iven the swarm of physical particles, the laws of physics, and the relevant honorary-scientific/functional type-identity claim, it is not accident, indeed it is inevitable that there should be a can opener. (p. 99)

Can this conclusion be resisted by pointing out the obvious; namely that the reasonable explanation for why there is a can opener there, is that the chef put it there, rather than some derivation from physics? (A point made by Putnam, 1975, pp. 295-8) Melnyk's answer is that this is a false dichotomy. *Both* explanations are valid. The presence of the can opener will both have a "non-reductive" causal explanation, and a reductive explanation. If, for example, we asked why the swarm of particles was present in the same place as the can opener, then the realization-reductive explanation would be the adequate explanation. The reductive explanation of whence the can opener, obviously need not be invoked or in any way whatever supplement the non-reductive explanation. If your interest is in knowing why there is a can-opener there, in the sense of who put the can opener there, then when you learn that the chef put it there, your query is completely answered.

Turning now to the regularities: are these explained

simply because each instance has a physical explanation? Yes, argues Melnyk, there is a strong analogy between this thesis, and everyday explanations in terms of a common cause:

We explain why the child developed a rash and a fever by citing a viral infection that first caused a rash and then a fever. ... The infection is responsible for both the rash and the fever; the narrow physical realizer of the F-token is responsible for both the F-token and the subsequent G-token. (p. 104)

Fine, so every instance of a regularity has an explanation, but does this mean that every regularity has a physical explanation? Melnyk responds: "what part of a regularity could be left unexplained if every instance of it has been explained" (p. 104)? In ordinary life we are sometimes satisfied that we have explained a regularity if we can explain each of its instances. If in a month there has been several plane crashes, thus a regularity, certainly this can be explained by explaining the cause of each plane crash. Of course it would be nice to have a unified explanation, but there is not always one, and even where there is one, this does not mean that a disunified explanation would not be an explanation. Melnyk is surely right when he argues that "even if a unified explanation is better than a disunified one, a disunified explanation is still an explanation" (p. 105). If, to illustrate with a

moral case, we can, in principle, explain in purely natural terms every application of the predicate "wicked" to acts, we will probably find that the explanation is disunified. Still, we have an explanation of the judgement that something is a wicked act. Nothing remains unexplained

These then were reasons for thinking that realization implies derivability and that derivability implies explainability. In defense of the view that physical explainability constitutes reduction (CR), Melnyk argues that it better captures what real scientists understand as reduction, and that, although it contradicts the received view, the view associated with Nagel, it actually expresses the real Nagel's fundamental idea of reduction. The real Nagel understood reduction in terms of the ability to explain. Melnyk quotes Nagel (1979) in support of his claim:

Reduction, in the sense in which the word is here employed, is the explanation of a theory or set of experimental laws established in one area of inquiry by a theory... for some other domain. (p. 338)

In support of the proposition that (CR) is true to the actual scientific goals of reduction, Melnyk (1994) quotes Francis Crick writing that reductionism is "the idea that it is possible, at least in principle, to explain a

phenomenon in terms of less complicated constituents" (p. 27) Practicing scientists, Melnyk thinks, "hold that it is in general a very good thing to be able to reduce things, hostility to reduction being tantamount, in their view, to hostility to the central scientific goal of explanation" (p. 83). Core-reduction, then, with its explicit criterion of physical explicability captures the essence of reduction.

4.7 Reductions, Conciliations and Nonnaturalism

Melnyk's core-reductionism avoids the philosophical emptiness of Nagel-reduction/the received view exposed by Kim. It explains supervenience, and it gives substantive content to the idea of reduction. It is also compatible with some of the "autonomy" claims of the "anti-reductivists". Core Reduction is clearly reductive in that it denies the anti-reductivists claim that

there are patterns in the world that simply cannot be noticed or stated in terms of lower level entities or generalizations. Such entities or generalizations are irreducible (and thus autonomous) because higher level terms and explanations are necessary ("required") to express them. On this view ...it is the failure of reduction due to the incompleteness of lower level ontology and explanation that justify the higher level explanations and their ontologies. (Polger, 2007, p. 13)

However, it is not reductive in the sense that it denies MR or claims to have eliminated pains, corkscrews, and other higher order phenomena. Melnyk (2003) writes:

Reducibility is not eliminability, of course; if a fact is reducible its existence is undiminished; indeed, if reducibility is (a special kind of) explainability, then, since explanation is necessarily of genuine facts, a fact acknowledged to be reducible cannot coherently be denied. (p. 87)

Secondly, multiple realization is accepted for many special science (and other) higher-order properties, nor is a failure of type-type identities seen as a threat to higher-order theories. Kim and Melnyk are careful to point out that the reductive explanation is not the only one, and often not even the best one. Melnyk (2003) writes:

Certainly (CR) claims that all special- and honorary-scientific facts of the specified kinds have an explanation that appeals only to physical facts and necessary truths; but, for all that, it remains an entirely open question whether these fact also have other explanations (e.g., non-reductive ones citing other special- or honorary scientific facts)... CR neither states nor implies that it would be in any way objectionable for one and the same token to have more than one explanation. ... (CR) does not claim that... explanations of special-or honorary-scientific facts that appeal only to physical facts and necessary truths should *replace* nonreductive explanations of those same facts that appeal to other special- or honorary scientific facts. (p. 85)

Melnyk's view hence appears to be compatible with Fodor's claim that "interesting generalizations can often

be made about events whose physical descriptions have nothing in common" and that sometimes it is "entirely irrelevant to the truth of a generalization or to their interestingness, or to their degree of confirmation".²⁶ It also seems to be compatible with Putnam's functionalism. Putnam argues against reduction that the best explanation for why a peg passes through square hole and not a round hole will appeal to the shape and size of the peg, the shape and size of the holes, rather than lower-level facts about "swarms of atoms". This claim can be granted by Melnyk, as long as it is accepted that event of the peg passing through, has a physical explanation.

We seem to have arrived at the possibility of a conciliation between so called nonreductive views and reductive ones. Perhaps all that Putnam and Fodor really insist on is the validity of higher-level explanations,

²⁶ Melnyk's view is, it would seem, a working out of the Humean supervenience/One World view describes by Stalnaker (1996):

Many of the terms and concepts of meteorology and geology are not to be found in the linguistic and conceptual repertoire of the physicist, but it seems clear that the meteorologist and the geologist are studying purely physical processes and events. The vocabularies of their sciences are different ways of talking about aspects and parts of the same reality that the physicist is concerned with. (p. 222)

rather than the metaphysical anti-reductive thesis that each explanatory approach is studying a distinct reality. This conclusion is supported by Thomas Polger who suggests that there is in fact an anti-metaphysical bent in the writings of celebrated anti-reductivists such as Putnam and Fodor. Polger (2007) writes,

These approaches are anti-metaphysical in the sense that they are suspicious of privileging metaphysical concerns. Instead they put explanatory concerns in the driver's seat and 'let the ontological chips fall where they may'" (p. 9)

If Bickle is right then Shafer-Landau's anti-reductive heroes, Fodor and Putnam may settle for core-reduction with autonomy and bracket ontological issues. The nonnaturalist however cannot partake of this happy conciliation. Core-reduction is incompatible with nonnaturalism. If our belief that hurting innocent persons for fun is wrong is made true by a relation between mind-independent moral and natural property instances, then unless there are such moral instances, and they are not just instances of natural properties under a moral description, then we are always in error. Remember, an expressivist like, for example, Gibbard agrees that moral concepts are "irreducible" in the sense that they apply to a multitude of different things, for a multitude of different reasons, and even "non-natural" in

the sense that they are not essentially about describing, explaining or predicting natural events. If, as on CR, every "moral" event has some exhaustive physical story, then he is (metaphysically) satisfied. Gibbard's and all other broad naturalist's quarrel is with the claim that moral thought and practice cannot be explained without supposing something extra-physical.

To conclude, if, as seems plausible, realization is core-reduction (or Kim-reduction), then realization is incompatible with nonnaturalism. It is incompatible with nonnaturalism, because any application of a moral predicate on this model is referring to something natural, rather than something besides this. The model truth as representation appealed to by the nonnaturalist realist becomes here a situation where when the mirror is held up against reality, nothing of a moral nature casts its reflection on it.

4.8 Conclusions of CH4

a) The arguments for irreducibility from lack of synonymy, from multiple-realization and from the "autonomy" of special science explanations are all compatible with real

reduction. The absence of type coextension does not imply the absence of reduction in the sense that matters.

b) Reduction in the sense that matters requires only that each instance of a type of a target theory be "exhaustively" physical. If every moral fact and property is exhaustively realized by natural facts and properties, then they have a natural explanation, and they are hence (core) reducible. It would then seem as if Shafer-Landau compares his view to a properly *reductive* view.

c) Certain nonreductivists in philosophy of mind may be satisfied with core-reductive realization physicalism, since it recognizes the validity of other perspectives. There is thus the possibility of conciliation.

d) Shafer-Landau cannot partake in this conciliation. Nonnaturalism is by definition against one-world metaphysics. Since realization is compatible with it, indeed perhaps its most coherent expression, nonnaturalism cannot be formulated in terms of a realization metaphysics.

In the following chapter 5 we will consider the causal argument against recognizing non-physical properties as existing in addition to physical properties, rather than just ways of describing a physical world.

Chapter 5

Causation and the Reality of Moral Properties

5.1 Introduction

It is a standard objection to moral realism that we have no reason to believe in moral properties because we don't need them in order to causally explain our moral judgments or any other events. Gilbert Harman (1977) is famous for making this argument. He argues that observation plays a different role in ethics than it does in empirical science. The best explanation for an empirical observation of something x is that it was caused by x , whereas the best explanation of a moral "observation" that something is wrong, need only refer to non-moral facts, together with the observer's moral beliefs. Harman illustrates his argument with a case -a contemporary classic- of some hoodlums pouring gasoline on a cat and setting fire to it. An onlooker's belief that burning the cat was wrong is fully explained, Harman argues, in terms of the moral principles of the onlooker in conjunction with his observation that the children set fire to the cat, and so there is no need to suppose that there is wrongness out there causing him to make the judgment. Harman (1977)

writes that

there does not seem to be any way in which the actual rightness or wrongness of a given act can have any effect on your perceptual apparatus. In this respect, ethics differ from science... [The] wrongness of the act does not appear to explain the act, which you observe, itself. The explanatory chain appears broken in such a way that neither the moral principle nor the wrongness of the act can help explain why you observe what you observe. (p.8)

The obvious fact that we do explain moral and non-moral facts using moral language -for example, greed, some say, brought down Wall Street- is insufficient as an answer to Harman's challenge. Legal predicates, aesthetic predicates, chess predicates, and so on, can all feature in true causal statements while the properties they refer to are best explained as in some sense subjective.²⁷ Consider once more the case of female attractiveness. This property while response-dependent is obviously projectible (if, for example, a woman is judged to be more attractive than she is also likely to be more intelligent) and it passes the counterfactual test -if Cindy Crawford hadn't been attractive she wouldn't have been a super-model (Satoshi Kanazawa, S. & Kovar, J.L., 2004). Moreover, as in the case of moral predicates, there seems to be a gap between a

²⁷ Subjective in the sense of "manmade" or "constructed" or "projected" or "response-dependent".

naturalistic account of attractiveness and the evaluative question of which women are attractive -is 16 or 36 the peak? - a question that can only be resolved by using your sense of beauty.²⁸ Notwithstanding, attractiveness remains inessential to the best *explanation* of female attractiveness. By "attractiveness" I mean exactly the types of features and the responses of attraction they elicit in men, and nothing more. These two elements, and together with the naturalistic explanation gives us an understanding of attractiveness which shows that it is not a fundamental property, but rather reducible in Melnyk's core reductive sense.

What is at issue is thus not whether we can make true causal statements using moral predicates -we can- but whether moral properties play any *essential causal role in such a way that they must be assumed lest our explanation be incomplete.*

²⁸ Donald Symons (1995) argues that women display the most overt sign of reproductive promise around 16 years old and are hence most attractive in this sense. But this naturalistic sense is not the common sense. One is free to accept Symons account, while still holding that 36 years old or some other age is her most attractive. Any naturalistic account defining "attractive" in terms of reproductive promise, would be extremely revisionary. This is an instance of Hume's Law.

5.2 Causal Inheritance

Shafer-Landau's response to Harman is that the nonnaturalist can borrow Kim's notion of causal inheritance. Kim (1998) explains the causal inheritance principle (CIP) as follows:

(CIP) If a second-order property F is realized on a given occasion by a first-order property H ... then the causal powers of this particular instance of F are identical with the causal powers of H. (p. 54)

The CIP, Shafer-Landau believes, is all it takes to save mental properties -and by analogy moral properties- from causal impotence:

If the causal inheritance principle is true as applied to the mental, and if a constitution account similar to the one that I have defended for the moral realm is correct, then mental properties, being realized by physical ones, will possess the causal potency of their physical realizers. And so we can keep them in the ontology. ... On this picture, it can and often will be true that a given mental event, all by itself, is sufficient to cause whatever physical outcome it does. And also true that a physical event all by itself, is sufficient to cause that very same outcome. And so there will be overdetermination. ... (p. 110)

Shafer-Landau explains how causal overdetermination is not a problem by means of an analogy:

Any given tree, for instance, is constituted by a

concatenation of molecules. When it falls and causes a loud noise that scares a bystander, we can in principle cite a molecular story that can explain the sound and the scared reaction. And we can also truthfully say that it was the tree, or its falling, all by itself, that caused the very same result. So there is a kind of over-determination here. But it is harmless. The two explanations are not competing with one another. (p. 110)

We can immediately see that this answer drifts unsteadily between the "nothing besides" of reduction, and "something besides" of non-reduction.

On a reductive understanding of constitution, it is true that both the lower-level and the higher-level explanation "are not competing with one another". There can be no conflict since on this theory the causal explanation involving the term "tree" is speaking of the very same physical facts and properties as those mentioned in the "molecular story". But this view of constitution does obviously *not* support Shafer-Landau's dualist "something besides" claim that "we can also truthfully say that it was the tree, or its falling, all by itself, that caused the very same result..." - All by itself? If "all by itself" means what it usually does, then this can only be a case of causal over-determination plus so-called down-wards causation (the strange situation of higher level phenomena causing lower level phenomena that already have sufficient

lower level causes). To illustrate this in the moral case: let's say that pain is evil. If what Shafer-Landau is arguing were true, then the burning cat's scream could be caused by either its physical causes or -all by itself- by the evil. This is hard to believe. We recognize this situation from chapter 3 where Shafer-Landau, wary of a reductive reading of constitution, gave up on explaining supervenience and suggested that constitution is compatible with *failure* of supervenience.

It is curious that Shafer-Landau should appropriate Kim's causal inheritance principle. Kim, as already mentioned in chapter 4, uses the CIP to argue that if the mental were to be understood as supervenient on the physical, but also irreducibly mental, then mental causation would be mysterious:

For there is nothing in the instantiation of F on this occasion over and above the instantiation of its realizer H. Given this, to think that this instance of F has causal powers in excess of H is tantamount to belief in magic: somehow new causal powers miraculously materialize as we define second-order and higher-order properties from a fixed stock of first-order properties! (1998, 55)

In short, having *inherited* causal powers means NOT having causal powers. Since we know that what we think and feel does influence what we do, the non-reductive model of

supervening mental properties is wrong. Shafer-Landau cannot save this situation by insisting that there is a coherent non-reductive reading of mental properties according to which they do have independent causal powers, since if this were the case then moral properties would, according to his own definition, be natural. And he doesn't. Rather, following nonnaturalist tradition, he holds/admits that they do not have causal powers, but that they are real all the same.

This is the right move for him. Shafer-Landau and the nonnaturalists are right to construe moral properties as having no independent causal powers. Whether construed as natural or nonnatural there are plenty of reasons for thinking that moral properties are similar in this respect to such non-causal properties dormativity and attractiveness. Here are two:

One. It seems very easy to switch to explanations in terms of the lower, non-moral level without losing important information with regards to the causal story. Take, for example, the much-discussed case of injustice causing a revolution. Say that the injustice was in form of high taxes, and a transfer of wealth from productive and intelligent, to the slothful and ignorant. This injustice caused the able to leave the country, or place their money

abroad, which in turn caused a collapse in the economy, which in turn spurred a revolution. Let us now imagine some left-wing academic who, having studied the same revolution arrives at the same causal story only with the difference that he does not see the taxes and the redistribution as unjust. Should we see the disagreement between these two intellectuals as one over the causes of the revolution, or as one over whether we should regard a certain level of taxation and redistribution as justified? It seems bizarre and philosophically tone-deaf not to pick up on the stark difference between the causal-explanatory analysis -the part that they agree on- and the (non-causal) question whether the distribution was just or not. Two. Moral explanations although possible, are rarely interesting. It is, for example, sometimes claimed that "Hitler's depravity" explains his actions. Yes, of course it does. It does so when the moral language succeeds in communicating the non-moral features serving as reasons for their attribution. But this takes us nowhere towards an *interesting* understanding of the man and his actions. No history book is satisfied with an invective explanation of Hitler. Such a book would be utterly idiotic and an insult to the reader. We reject having the moral world-view of the historian taking the place of more neutral accounts.

Indeed much of the quaintness of old history books stems from the plentiful use of evaluative language in their causal explanations.

But what now remains of his argument from analogy? The claim that mental properties lack causal powers, suggests that they are epiphenomenal -meaning that they are caused by the physical, but lack the power to cause anything in the physical realm. If they are viewed as epiphenomenal, then they cannot be seen as a model for moral properties, since no moral realist believes that moral properties are caused by their supervenience base. That is, epiphenomenalism is *probably* too high a price to pay to avoid causal over-determination and causal downwards-causation in the philosophy of mind, but it is *certainly* an implausible model for moral properties.

Chapter 6

Are Moral Properties like Qualia?

6.1 Some Similarities, Mostly Differences

If moral properties are not causal, and they are not epiphenomenal, how can they be essential to an explanation of ethical phenomena? What prevents us from drawing the conclusion that no independent causal powers means no mind-independent existence? And where now is the metaphysical difference between Shafer-Landau and a sophisticated expressivist who believes that moral properties are presupposed by moral discourse, supervene on natural facts, and lack causal powers/are thin? In chapter 1, we saw Fritz McDonald (2006) drawing the line between realists and anti-realists in terms of causality:

(W)e can characterize the view denied by expressivists, the view that there are robust moral properties, as follows: Robust Properties: A property is robust iff such a property figures into causal explanations. We can further define a notion of robust fact as follows: Robust Facts: A fact F is a robust fact iff such a fact involves the attribution of a robust property. Thus the central metaphysical component of expressivism is best characterized as the view that there are moral facts and moral properties, but there are no robust moral properties, and no robust moral facts. (p. 92)

If this is true, then Shafer-Landau's moral properties are

no different from Blackburn's "shadows of predicates" (see Chapter 2.5) and he and every nonnaturalist would in effect deny their own view while stating it. By describing moral properties as non-causal, they would describe them as non-existent. Nonnaturalist realists resist this argument by denying the view that to be is to have causal powers (known as "Alexander's Dictum"). Possible counter examples abound: abstract objects like numbers, propositions and universals, and concrete objects like holes, vacuums, past objects, future objects, and Meinongian objects, to mention just a few (Cargile, 2003). For the nonnaturalists since Plato the traditional object of comparison has been the ontology of mathematics and geometry. The problems with this analogy are:

a) that moral statements are not analytically true, or contradictory, calling what is evil "good", is not, despite Kant, a logical mistake, and its entirely possible to *understand* different moral views, whereas a denial of $2+4 = 6$ is incoherent;

b) it begs the question by assuming Platonism or some form of realism about mathematical reality,

and;

c) one of the reasons to accept an ontology of mathematics is that mathematics is integral to our scientific effort of describing, predicting and manipulating reality. But it is unclear how the same can be said of morality (how is morality integral to our scientific effort of understanding reality?).

Of course, what concerns us here is the analogy with the philosophy of mind. Shafer-Landau suggests that the absence of causal work for his properties should not worry a nonnaturalist by means of a comparison to phenomenal experience:

We believe there is such a thing as the pungent taste of wasabi or the acrid smell of a sulphur pit because we have had direct experience of it, not because the experience has caused something apart from itself. It may or may not play such a further causal role, but our evidence for the existence of such subjective experience and our warrant for believing in its existence does not depend on its causal powers. ... Our warrant for thinking that moral facts exist is likewise independent of the effects they might bring about. (p. 111)

There is no denying that there are parallels between theorizing about phenomenal experience "qualia" and ethics. Frank Jackson's knowledge argument was alluded to in the first sentence of this essay. Jackson (1986) argued that if you know all the physical facts about the world, but lack color-vision, you would not know all the facts of the

world, namely, you wouldn't know what, for example, red looks like. He concluded that phenomenal facts are non-physical. The apparent gap between physical knowledge of the world, and knowing what something looks like, or feels like, sounds like, smells like, or tastes like, evokes Hume's law: the apparent gap between facts and values, between what is and what ought to be. No amount of knowledge of what is can imply what ought to be. Thomas Nagel (1986) emphasized this similarity in his classic *The View from Nowhere* where he argued that our impulse to make the objective point of view dominant is responsible for skepticism concerning both mind and morals.

Can the parallels between the qualia problem and the moral property problem shed light on the latter? Shafer-Landau's argument presumably is this: on his constitution view moral properties have no essential causal role. The lack of causal role is an important reason for thinking that a property is not robustly mind-independent. However, one of the elements of mind, phenomenal consciousness, or qualia is such that we believe that it is objectively real, whether or not it has causal powers. Therefore, we can believe in moral properties as mind-independent despite their doing no essential causal explanatory work.

Notice that Shafer-Landau's *qualia* argument is making an epistemological claim, not a metaphysical one. It says that we can know *qualia* without having been caused to know by the *qualia*. This is a controversial position contradicting the causal paradigm of knowledge. But, more importantly, it is not what Shafer-Landau has explicitly advertised, which is a view about the relationship between the moral and the natural. The bare claim that we have non-causal knowledge of *qualia*, even if accepted, does little in terms of shedding light on their metaphysical status in a physical world. This is evident since even if accepted that we may know *qualia* non-causally, this does not mean that we must believe that *qualia* could exist non-causally. In fact, *qualia* and arguments like Jackson's make many philosophers reject the view that every mental occurrence is "exhaustively constituted" by the physical. Jackson for example once took his argument to imply that *qualia* are epiphenomenal. This, as we have seen, is not the right model for moral properties. Kim's and Melnyk's models understand physical constitution in terms of the physical filling all the roles specified in some higher level "special or honorary-science" language. But both see *qualia* as a hard case. Kim (2005) writes that "phenomenal mental properties are not functionally definable and hence

functionally irreducible" (P. 29). He has no strong positive view of the metaphysics of phenomenal properties although the fact that they have causal powers makes him attracted to the view that they must, somehow, be physical.

Quite simply, the qualia problem is harder than that of moral properties. Indeed, the question of external accommodation of qualia, that of placing them in a physical world, goes under the moniker "the hard problem",²⁹ a fact that should give pause to any effort of clarifying *anything* by suggesting that it's "just like in the case of qualia." Of course, it's disquieting that we understand ourselves as pursuing lives because they are valuable, whereas our scientific point of view reveals no objective values. And the shift that we make between seeing the world from our practical point of view, and our capacity to see our own values from a theoretical point of view, in their historical contingency, is disturbing. Nevertheless, the moral "gap" is not as radical as that between what the brain seems like from the outside - a chunk of meat - and the unique experienced world inside it. The issue of what makes moral beliefs true if anything, given Hume's law, does not have the appearance of a question so deep that we

²⁹ Named so by David Chalmers (1996).

may fear -as does Colin McGin (1989) concerning consciousness- that our minds have not evolved to solve it.

And certainly we should be able to explain virtue and vice, independently of a metaphysics of qualia! Whatever the right positive account for qualia proves to be, there is a large step between that, and showing that there is an important isomorphism between qualia and moral properties. To illustrate, Frank Jackson long combined anti-reductionism about qualia, with a throwback, analytic, reductivist, naturalism about the moral.³⁰ That is as far as you can get from Shafer-Landau and G.E. Moore within moral realism. In fact, there are strong and obvious disanalogies between the domains that tell against thinking that their metaphysics will be the same. It is perhaps an overstatement to say that "the pungent taste of wasabi" has *nothing* in common with, say, the injustice of the war on drugs, but the likeness certainly isn't evident. While we have something close to first-person authority concerning how something seems to us, we do not have the same authority with regards to the truth of moral claims.

³⁰ Jackson (2003) argues against nonnaturalism that: "The problem is that it is hard to see how one could rationally care one way or the other whether the sui generis property was instantiated or not. ... We know enough about what our world is like to know that there is no such property in the sense that it is nowhere instantiated." (P. 7)

Indeed, is not the comparison to states existing essentially subjectively rather supporting the moral subjectivist? If the "pungent taste of Wasabi" exists only for someone, then perhaps, by analogy, the wrongness of an act, exists only for someone?

The comparison to qualia does very little for nonnaturalist moral metaphysics.

6.2 The Qualia Analogy is a Dead End

Despite this, we must agree with Shafer-Landau that failing the causal test does not prove that moral properties are not real. If something is understood as having no independent causal powers, then not being able to see it, hear it, touch it, and so on, and having no need for it as an essential part of a causal explanation, cannot count against it. In fact, it's just what we would expect. God is not going to be empirically disproved any time soon. But for the purposes of this dissertation, we can conclude that comparing moral properties to mental properties, be it intentional states ("propositional attitudes" like beliefs, desires, thoughts) or be it qualia, has in no way elucidated or made more believable the claim that there are

mind-independent moral properties in addition to the "familiar world of physics". Shafer-Landau's attempt to normalize strongly objective moral properties by way of the constitution model either collapses into reductive naturalism or is a form of epiphenomenalism and/or an unresolved mystery.

6.3 Summary and Conclusions of Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5

Shafer-Landau's strategy of breathing new life in to nonnaturalism by exploiting the strategies of non-reductive materialism in philosophy of mind has failed. Here is why:

a) Nonnaturalists cannot explain why moral supervenience holds and why it holds as a conceptual truth. This is a problem since if moral properties are distinct and irreducible then we would expect supervenience *not* to be a conceptual truth. In fact, we would expect it to be more like the supervenience of mental properties in this respect. The analogy to the mental domain therefore backfires. The problem with relying on a constitution model here is that either it is understood as not implying reduction in which case it implies supervenience, but is

incompatible with nonnaturalism, or it is understood as something other than reduction, in which case it does not imply supervenience. We saw that Shafer-Landau in the end chose to admit that his non-reductive understanding of constitution does not imply supervenience. So, the nonnaturalist realist cannot explain supervenience.

B) The chief argument for irreducibility is the argument from multiple realization. We saw that, contrary to popular belief, multiple realizability does not mean irreducibility in any interesting sense. What it means is that different concepts and languages reflect different interests and perspectives, and that no perfect match between concepts and terms will be found, but this fact is compatible with the thesis that they are describing the same reality. The idea that moral thought and language refer to something besides and in addition to the physical property instances in each occurrence exhaustively constituting the moral property instances is incoherent. Kim and Melnyk have used the idea of realization to formulate a better understanding of reduction. If these views are mostly correct, as I think they are, then Shafer-Landau has in fact compared his metaphysics of moral properties to the best *reductive* model. Constitution is

therefore not the right metaphysics for the nonnaturalist.

c) Shafer-Landau suggests that irreducible supervenient mental properties may have causal powers, namely the ones that they have inherited from the descriptive properties. Since "inherited" simply means: *not* having any independent causal powers, epiphenomenalism is in fact accepted. This is an intolerable position in philosophy of mind - a reason for abandoning nonreductive views of supervenience - so certainly nothing can be gained by the analogy. Shafer-Landau and most nonnaturalists agree with the anti-realist that every fact about morality that has a causal explanation can be fully explained without supposing objective moral properties, but hold that this means that they have non-causal existence. We believe that there is qualia without being caused by qualia to believe so, so why not believe that there are moral properties? But this argument does nothing in the way of explaining moral metaphysics, since qualia are simply very different from moral properties. Second, qualia presents a greater puzzle than moral properties. Third, a qualia analogy may just as well, perhaps even more naturally, support moral subjectivism.

These then were the main points of chapters 2 - 6. We

can conclude that the cause of nonnaturalism has not been advanced in the least by Shafer-Landau's analogy to the philosophy of mind. The paradigm of industrial strength truth for moral claims requires that we view them in the manner of nonnaturalists like Shafer-Landau: as mind-independent properties that are part of the nature of things, and as simply there to be represented by our moral thought and discourse. As it turns out Shafer-Landau's constitution metaphysics gives no proper content to facts about what ought to be. The view, insofar as it is coherent, seems to collapse to a sort of error theory, since it claims that moral commonsense attributes objective values to characters, actions, and principles, whereas it also claims that in each instance there is *nothing* besides instances of natural properties. To illustrate, the principle that inflicting pain for the fun of it is wrong is, on the nonnaturalist model we consider, made true by events of inflicting needless pain being such that they instantiate nonnatural wrongness, but if there is nothing besides instances of natural properties present in each case and every case, how, on this picture, can the principle be said to be true? The pain felt by Harman's cat does not seem to "exhaustively" constitute the moral fact that it is evil, or not to be inflicted.

The idea of comparing moral properties to mental properties and other so called special-science properties, rather than resulting in a three-dimensional understanding whereby they are both visible from a moral point of view, and also from a theoretical point of view as supervening on a natural reality, serves only to blur issues. It disregards G.E. Moore's guiding insight that everything is what it is and not something else. It is the kind of blur created by the non-reductive supervenience theorists in philosophy of mind, who believe that mental properties can both be held to be non-physical, and also as entirely constituted by the physical. This is, as argued above, only true in the sense that one can study the mind using different intellectual tools, than are used in studying the brain, but it is unlikely that different things are actually studied. And if this is in fact the case, then it needs to be explained how these different things are related to each other, preferably in a way which makes it true that what we think and feel have consequences. Perhaps this can be done. But certainly it's not too optimistic to think that moral theorizing can advance independently of a solution to the mind-body problem, and without adding basic properties to what our best scientific theories tells us is real.

CHAPTER 7

Realism without Queer Moral Objects

7.1 Introduction

The vacillation between the metaphysically baroque, the reductive and the insubstantial, is not just a problem for Shafer-Landau's version of nonnaturalism. G.E. Moore himself expressed doubts about the coherence and plausibility of robust moral properties. In "The Concept of Intrinsic Value" Moore (1922) writes that,

There must be some characteristics belonging to intrinsic properties which predicates of value never possess. And it seems to me quite obvious that there is; only I can't see what it is... I can only vaguely express the kind of difference I feel there to be by saying that intrinsic properties seem to describe the intrinsic nature of what possesses them in a sense in which predicates of value never do. If you could enumerate all the intrinsic properties a given thing possessed, you would have given a complete description of it, and would not need to mention any predicates of value it possessed; whereas no description of a given thing could be complete which omitted any intrinsic property. (pp. 272-273)

What could Moore mean by "intrinsic properties describe... in a sense in which predicates of value never do"? If properties "describe" then they are part of thought and language and not objective truth-makers. And if, as he

writes, a complete description of the intrinsic properties of something need not mention values, certainly it is hard to see what remains of his ontological claim. It is therefore tempting to conclude with James Dreier (2004) that the "[t]he exciting and (to many) implausible thesis that good is a non-natural property turns out to be the popular and mundane thesis that evaluative terms are not reducible to descriptive ones" (2004, p.41).

But does a nonnaturalist realist really have to commit herself to mind-independent moral properties? There are philosophers, such as John McDowell, Ronald Dworkin and Thomas Nagel, who while commonly classified as moral nonnaturalist realists, are contemptuous of the notion of robust mind-independent moral properties. Dworkin (1996) memorably describes such posits as "morons" belonging to an "absurd moral field theory". The strategy of the moral realist, in these writers' opinion, should not be to find a place for moral facts on the terms of science, but rather reject the "absolutist" metaphysical picture according to which only that which is visible from an Archimedean point outside all subjectivity is real. This metaphysics is not compulsory but is largely a matter of what empiricists consider good taste. It amounts not to a true picture of

what is real, but rather to, in the words of Nagel, an "objective blindness".³¹ If these thinkers are right, then the failure of Shafer-Landau to spell out a believable moral metaphysics for strongly mind-independent moral properties is not a serious threat to non-reductive/nonnatural moral realism as such, but only to his particular Mooreanism. Their views do not fall easily in to the nonnaturalist/naturalist categories since they reject a wholly "scientistic", wholly "disenchanted", as McDowell puts it, view of Nature. They are however clearly nonnaturalist in the sense that they affirm moral properties as irreducibly *moral*, and as *knowable* from a particular moral point of view.

In what follows I will argue that these proposals face a similar dilemma as Shafer-Landau's realization account. Either they fail as explanation by being empty and unclear, or they fail to accommodate the intuitions which make realism a *prima facie* attractive view. In particular they provide no principled ground for resisting relativism. John McDowell's secondary property realism/sensibility realism and Ronald Dworkin's minimalism will be considered in turn

³¹ "[T]here are things about the world and life and ourselves that cannot be adequately understood from a maximally objective standpoint..." (Nagel, 1986, p. 7).

as examples of realism "without queer moral objects".

7.2 Evaluating McDowell's View - Rebranding Relativism

McDowell (1998) believes that to think of moral properties as entirely mind-independent is "impossible -at least on reflection- to take seriously..." (p. 132). He does not, however, think that this prevents them from being real. McDowell defends his position with the help of Locke's distinction between primary and secondary properties. Primary properties, according to McDowell, are properties that exist "independently of human sensibility." A standard example is shape. A triangle is a figure with three angles making up 180 degrees. Our typical response to triangularity is in no way part of its essence. Secondary properties on the other hand can only be understood in terms how they would appear to a certain subject in certain circumstances. Color is a typical example. An object is red in virtue of looking red (to certain subjects in certain circumstances). Locke (1689) believed that secondary properties are "nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us..." (Book 2:

Chapter 8).³² Naively we may think of colors as in the objects themselves, but this amounts to a projective error.³³ To think that the redness of a rose resembles our

³² Jacovides (2007) provides a helpful summary of Locke's distinctions:

1. Primary qualities are explanatory; secondary qualities are not deeply explanatory.
2. Ideas of primary qualities resemble something in bodies; ideas of secondary qualities do not.
3. Primary qualities are not dispositions; secondary qualities are dispositions to produce ideas in us.
4. The genera of primary qualities are inseparable from bodies; the genera of secondary qualities are separable.
5. Primary qualities belong to bodies as they are in themselves; secondary qualities do not.
6. Primary qualities, with the possible exception of some sorts of velocity, are real beings; secondary qualities are not.

³³ This is to this day the dominant paradigm in color research. Here are two representative passages:

[We] know from psychophysical and neurophysiological investigations that color is created somewhere in the brain, although the exact location of this process is still unknown, and we even have no idea what entities the sensations called color are... In short, colors appear only at first naïve glance to be located in the objects." (Backhaus & Menzel, 1992, p.28)

The results described here... suggests that the nervous system, rather than analyze colours, takes what information there is in the external environment, namely, the reflectance of different surfaces for different wavelengths of light, and transforms that information to construct colours, using its own algorithms to do so. In other words, it constructs something which is a property of the brain, not the world outside. (1983, p.764)

There is much agreement between McDowell's view and the Standard view. They agree that a) colors are dependent on subjective color experience, b) that objects have their colors "in virtue of some microscopic textural property of

idea of red, is as erroneous as supposing that the pain we feel from being stung by its thorns belongs to it. Hume famously exploited this model for value properties. He argued that objects, acts, characters etc. cause impressions of pain and pleasure and that on the basis of these our imagination forms ideas of good and evil, vice and virtue, thus "gilding or staining all natural objects with colors borrowed from internal sentiment" (1751/1907, p. 265). This process Hume thought "raises in manner a new creation". J.L Mackie continued in Hume's tradition arguing that moral values present themselves as if they were primary properties, but since they are not, morality is based on an error.

McDowell's moral sense theory is developed in response to Mackie's Error Theory. He argues that: a) colors are dispositions in objects to look a certain way in certain conditions and that they are in this sense real, and that b) we do not, and cannot, naively think of them as primary properties. Mackie and other anti-realists go wrong, McDowell argues, when they think that the fact that our responses partly constitutes a property makes it unreal.

its surface" (1998, p. 142) and that c) colors are not needed to causally explain color perception. While agreeing to (c), McDowell rejects the causal explanatory test of reality.

The mistake they make, according to McDowell, is that of equating reality with mind-independence (objectivity). Something can be subjective -dependent on our response- while still be real and "there to be experienced as opposed to being a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it" (p. 134). McDowell uses our experience of red objects to illustrate this point:

An object's being such as to look red is independent of its actually looking red to anyone on any particular occasion; so, notwithstanding the conceptual connection between being red, an experience of something as red can count as a case of being presented with a property that is there anyway - independently of the experience itself. (p. 134)

Something similar, McDowell believes, is true about value properties:

Values are not brutally there -not there independently of our sensibilities- any more than colours are: though, as with colours, this does not prevent us from supposing that they are there independently of any particular apparent experience of them. (p. 146)

McDowell believes that this model shows us how values are real, while also essentially tied to our sensibilities. To illustrate: the cruelty of an act is dependent on our response of contempt for it. This means that someone who responds with contempt to this act is aware of the cruelty. Someone who does not react with contempt -or some such negative reaction- does not see the cruelty of the act.

This constitutes not only a failure of sentiment, but a failure to accurately represent the world. The fact that seeing the cruelty in an act requires a sentiment, also explains, McDowell thinks, why judging something to be cruel, implies wanting to, for example, prevent such behavior. His theory hence promises to answer the traditional worry that realists cannot explain how a moral fact can be both objective, while also enjoy an intimate connection to our will and desires.

7.3 Evaluating McDowell's View - Rebranding Relativism

That McDowell's view of secondary properties is unsuitable as a model for moral realism becomes clear once we consider his own example of a property-constituting sensibility. "Value experience involves taking admiration, say, to represent its object as having a property that (although there in the object) is essentially subjective in much the same way as the property of redness..." (p. 143). If red objects are those that cause us to see them as red, then, analogously, admirable acts are those that cause our admiration. In short, to be admirable is to be admired. This is of course strongly subjectivist.

McDowell immediately diagnoses the problem: "The disanalogy... is that a virtue (say) is conceived to be not merely such as to elicit the appropriate attitude... but rather such as to merit it" (p. 143). This is no little wrinkle. If the secondary quality model as understood by McDowell implies that whatever we happen to admire is admirable, then it is incompatible with realism. There are in fact *many* reasons for doubting that the color analogy supports realism. Colors must be standardized by reference to the normal perceiver, but it is not a realist position to think that the *normal* moral perception is the right one. Further, there are empirical reasons for thinking that color perception varies greatly even among statistically normal observers. There is for example a difference between men and women. Bimler, Kirkland & Jameson (2004) have conducted research suggesting that "males and females differed in their (average) sensitivity to particular dimensions of color space" (p. 128). The mechanism is assumed to be that many women have 4 color pigments rather than 3, the normal number for men. If Jim, a perfectly average male, sees a tomato as red, while Lisa, a perfectly average woman, sees it as having a slightly different shade of red, *who, Jim or Lisa, sees a color that is objectively real? Whose red is there "anyway"?* Certainly our choice

here is arbitrary and certainly realism cannot accept that values, particularly moral values, are arbitrary!

There are then a great number of disanalogies between secondary properties and value properties.³⁴ McDowell therefore wisely abandons the secondary quality analogy in favor of the idea that value properties may be like danger, or the fearful. These properties, like secondary-properties, are partly constituted by our sensibilities - this is where the models overlap- but rather than *causing* our response, they *merit* it. McDowell explains that

we make sense of fear by seeing it as a response to objects that merit such a response ... for an object to merit fear just is for it to be fearful. So explanations of fear that manifest our capacity to understand ourselves... will simply not cohere with the claim that reality contains nothing in the way of fearfulness. (p. 144)

McDowell believes that this account

should leave it quite un-mysterious how a fear response rationally grounded in awareness of these 'fearful-making characteristics' can be counted as being, or yielding, knowledge that one is confronted by an instance of real fearfulness. (p. 144)

The big idea here is that we need to go beyond the standard Humean picture where there is only our responses to a

³⁴ Blackburn (1993) provides a laundry list of disanalogies in his essay "Errors and the Phenomenology of Value".

"valueless" world and suppose that our sensibility is tracking real fearfulness that is both "there in the object" because we are scared, and also the justifying reason -while not also the causal reason- for why we are scared.³⁵ To illustrate, Jim fears death, and if death merits fear, then Jim's fear makes him aware of the fearfulness of death. The fearfulness of death hence justifies his fear. If someone, Epicurus, does not fear death, then he is ignorant of the fearfulness of death. Epicurus fails to see that he is confronted by a real instance of fearfulness that is "there in the object".

What reasons do we have for thinking that this model is better than the standard, Humean model? That is, why introduce a *third* element to the story of the world and our varied responses of fear to it: the *fearfulness*, that is, the *merit* of the fear response? The claim that we need a view about what merits fear in order to make sense of fear is *prima facie* implausible. Stoics who think that *nothing* merits fear and ordinary people who believe that many things merit fear, may both "make sense" of fear. Their disagreement is not over what fear is, it is about whether

³⁵ McDowell denies independent causal powers for value properties: "[I]t is... even more obvious with values than with phenomenal qualities that they cannot be credited with causal efficacy..." (p. 142)

death merits fear. To ask a scientist who studies fear to give us a list of what he has found to merit fear, is as theoretically uninteresting as asking Symons (1995) (who explains female attractiveness as an adaptive response in the male (chapter 3)) whether 16 year old women are more attractive than 36 year old women. His explanation of female attractiveness is not incomplete -or a failure to "make sense" of attractiveness- just because he doesn't tell us whether Britney Spears is more attractive than Madonna. There is no good reason for thinking that views about what merits fear, or what merits attraction, are an essential part of the project of making sense of these properties.

The perhaps even more damaging problem is that when McDowell makes the switch from the contingent "actual response" of the secondary property model to the "merited response" model, he takes on the burden of explaining how exactly we should think of the claim that our responses partly constitute the value property. This is a burden that he cannot meet. Consider once more fear of death. Jim fears death, and we assume that death is fearful. But it is not *his* particular response that makes it so/constitutes the property. According to the story, if Jim had not feared

death, or if he stopped fearing it, death would still merit fear. So whose response can make it a fact/partly constitutes the fact, that death merits fear? The most straightforward answer to this question is that God has established an order of fitting responses to the world. Fear befits death. Admiration befits generosity. And so on. McDowell, like Shafer-Landau and most academic nonnaturalists, does not rely on God in their theory. So who or what can play the theoretical role of having the response that constitutes the fact that something *merits* this response?

McDowell's answer is: culture/society and in particular the virtuous agents within it.

When a decent upbringing initiates us to the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to this tract of the space of reasons... We can so much as understand, let alone seek to justify, the thought that reason make this demand on us only at a stand point within a system of concepts and conceptions that enables us to think about such demands, that is, only at a standpoint from which demands of this sort comes in to view. (p. 82)

Moral education shapes how we respond to the world. We develop a second-nature. The best of us, the truly virtuous, will develop a sensitivity to the world, that enables us understand what kind of response various

situations merit. Indeed the virtuous won't even see what other responses they could erroneously be thought to merit. This allows McDowell (2002) to affirm the existence of categorical imperatives in the sense that "to a virtuous person, certain actions are presented as practically necessary" because he occupies a stand point *within* a cultural system, a while joining Mackie in denouncing "the insane thesis that simply to say "You should..." to someone is enough to give him a reason for acting; as if, when he protested "But why should I?", it was sufficient to reply 'You should, that's all'" (p. 79). McDowell uses the example of less controversial virtue of kindness. Someone who is kind will know that someone's being shy merits being nice to this person. So, the fact that shyness merits gentleness, is constituted by the kind person's gentle response to shy people.

There is no need for a long argument to see that this won't do as an answer to the question of *whose* response constitutes the fact that a certain response is merited. Certainly it is circular to suggest that the responses of someone who responds the way that situations merit, also constitute the fact that her responses are merited. This problem persists if we ask about the nature of the virtuous

person herself. Does the fact that some type of person merits admiration, consist in the fact that admiring this type of person merits admiration? Whose admiration? And so on. Perhaps a circle of self-congratulatory friends can admire each other and determine what they consider to be an enchanted world of moral facts! The regressive circularity and emptiness is an old and tired point against virtue theories, but valid all the same. Bransen (2002), a lesser known reviewer, puts it succinctly: "MCDowell's account of virtue presupposes that the moral facts are determined and therefore cannot be used to determine the moral facts" (p. 194).

The importance of culture and language in forming our responses will sustain exactly the kind of moral reality accepted by moral relativists. Whether we are Taliban or headhunters, Victorians or 21-century Western liberals, we will develop a second nature and a moral conceptual scheme and a moral emotional repertoire. It is therefore not enough for a realist -as it is for a relativist- to point to such processes as the answer to what constitutes a merited response. This point is easy to see when considering cultures we disagree with. Certainly it is easier for a more puritan culture to "recognize" and name

offensive behaviors.³⁶ Many things offend them, but why would this be reason for thinking that these behaviors *merit* the response of offense? Conversely, our Western culture's recent lack of response to what we used to consider shocking behavior similarly does not imply that these behaviors do *not* merit outrage. The facts of culture, second nature etc. may explain our responses, and how these, in Hume's words, create "in a manner a new creation". But these facts do not explain or constitute the fact of meriting, or, at least not in a way congenial to robust realism.

In fact, Mackie appears to anticipate McDowell's view when after denouncing objective categorical reason he admits that from the standpoint of someone participating in an institution some reasons do, as McDowell puts it, 'present themselves as practically necessary.' Mackie writes,

Do the desires and especially the sufferings of other people, if known to me, constitute a reason for me to do something, if I can, or to do something to satisfy those desires or to relieve those sufferings? It would be natural to say that they constitute some reason... But the important thing is that if we recognize this as [an example of] a further class of reasons, independently of any desire that I now have to help these other people, we are... bringing in the

³⁶ Allan Gibbard's example.

requirements of something like an institution,; an established way of thinking, a moral tradition, demands that I show some concern for the wellbeing of others, or at least of some others, and this demand may have been written into ordinary language among rules about what can or cannot count as a reason. (p. 79)

It is reasonable to interpret Mackie as describing what McDowell calls a "space of reason" and as making the point that the only sense that "categorical reasons" can have is relative to it. What Mackie and McDowell denounce are *strongly objective* categorical reasons. That is, the authors agree that *in so far* as moralizers believe that there is *more* objectivity than this, they are in error. So while they disagree over whether moral discourse inextricably contains this error, their substantive explanations of moral thought converge at important points. What allows McDowell to spin this as a win for realism is his over-stating the degree to which we are actually forced to stay inside a particular, coherent world of value. Mackie, on the other hand, as we saw in chapter 3, realizes that the existence of institutions, or systems, like promise-keeping, does not force us to accept its (subjective) categorical-seeming demands, and such institutions are not, like the case of the puritan ethics might be taken to illustrate, self-validating.

For all McDowell's sophisticated arguments, the fact-value gap remains. On one hand there is the fact that we respond certain ways to the world, on the other hand there is the fact, or what may be a fact, that certain of these responses are merited. McDowell cannot claim that the one is constituted by the other without giving up realist aspiration and become a RINO. To uphold moral realism McDowell, I submit, must assume that there are simple facts about what responses are rational/merited. They must be simple since, as just argued, they cannot be seen as themselves constituted by "our" response. There is no account of the metaphysics of these facts in McDowell. He purports to show how something can be both, as Mackie has it, a "matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world" and also a real aspect of the world "independent of any particular apparent experience of them": both "there in the object" and also not "brutely there". The result is an unstable view, not unlike Shafer-Landau's theory that each instance of a moral property is both "nothing besides" and also not the same as it's exhaustively physical constitution.

7.4. Dworkin - Minimalism, Realism as a Morality

Ronald Dworkin (1996) like McDowell is dismissive of mind-independent moral properties. And like McDowell he is skeptical of the very presuppositions of the realist-anti-realist debate. The moral realist should not have to defend moral properties as mind-independent objectively prescriptive additions to the ontology of physics. He disparagingly refers to Mooreanism as the "absurd moral field thesis" and describes it as committed to the view that

the universe houses, among its numerous particles of energy and matter, some special particles -morons- whose energy and momentum establish fields that at once constitute the morality or immorality, or virtue or vice, of particular human acts and institutions and also interact in some way with human nervous system so as to make people aware of the morality or of the virtue or vice. (p. 127)

According to Dworkin the statement that there are moral facts is a *moral* statement, and the denial of it is also a moral statement. He writes:

If someone thinks that abortion is morally wrong he might well say that "It is just true that abortion is morally wrong" But that would be only an impatient restatement of his substantive position. Some of the other further claims do seem to add something to the original claim, but only by substituting more precise I-propositions [internal proposition] for it.. So when I say that the badness of abortion is objective, or that abortion is objectively or really bad it would be natural to understand me as explaining that I do not regard my views about abortion in that way. I would be emphasizing that in my view, the deliberate

destruction of human life at any stage is impermissible for reasons that in no way depends on my or anyone else's personal reaction or tastes. The claim that abortion is objectively wrong seems equivalent, that is in ordinary discourse, to another of the further claims I made: that abortion would still be wrong even if no one thought it was. That read most naturally is just another way of emphasizing the content of the original claim, of emphasizing once again that I mean that abortion is just plain wrong. (p. 98)

The expressed target of Dworkin's theory are relativists and in particular postmodernist relativists who deny that there is any objective truth in ethics, only different views. According to Dworkin, this position amounts to no more than the moral claim that, for example, having an abortion is neither wrong nor right, or, alternatively, that it is wrong for those who accept a morality forbidding it, and permissible for those who accept a morality which permits it.

7.5.1. Evaluating Dworkin - Rebranding Quasi-Realism

The main problem with Dworkin's view is that while it denounces objective moral properties and states that moral reasons do not depend on what anyone think they are, there is no account either of what it *means* to express this moral view, nor any reason given for why we should think that it is correct.

The strategy of denying a metaphysical content to realist sounding statements in fact reminds us of Blackburn who deployed it in conjunction with Ramsey's ladder to show that quasi-realists can say the same thing as realists concerning objectivity and mind-independence, because these claims are *moral* claims and as such explicable along expressivist lines. It is indeed hard to distinguish their views: which of the following statements is written by Dworkin and which is written by Blackburn?

To say that an ethical view is true is just to reaffirm it and so it is if we add weighty words 'really', 'true', 'fact' 'objectively so', and so on. To say that it is objectively true is to affirm that its truth does not vary with what we happen to believe about it, and once more this is an internal, first order ethical position. (p. 269)

According to me there is only one proper way to take the question 'on what does the wrongness of wanton cruelty depend?' as a moral question in which no mention of our actual responses properly figures. (p. 173)³⁷

Dworkin's view appears to be little more than a celebration of moral phenomenology. No reason is given for thinking that an explanation of it cannot be given without supposing irreducible moral facts. Believing that there is a "right answer" is certainly a part of much moralizing,

³⁷ The first passage is from Dworkin (1996) the second is from Blackburn (1988).

but many practices best understood anti-realistically also assume that there is a right answer. Gibbard (2003) gives us the example of planning whether to pack now or later. When we think about this we are assuming that there is a right answer. But of course, if we pick one of the options, it's not because it has an irreducible property of being "the thing to do", rather it's because we figured that the option had the overall best result relative to our goals. We arrive at a hypothetical imperative while assuming the existence of a thing-to-be-done fact. Similarly, to use a stock example from the anti-realist play-book, if you are playing musical chairs, the last person sitting is a winner. But it's because he sitting on the last chair that he is the winner, it's not because he has some property "winner" that he sits on the last chair.

What is lacking in Dworkin's picture can be made clear by means of a comparison to Carnap's (1956) use of the internal/external distinction.³⁸ Carnap argued that questions about existence only make sense from within a system (accepting its fundamental principles) or as external questions about whether the system itself is useful. This latter question is a broadly pragmatic

³⁸ It is not clear whether it is merely an analogy, or the general theory from which Dworkin's view is derived.

question. Any other external questions - Does the system as such map on to Reality? Are its posits real in an absolute, non-system relative sense? - invite metaphysical nonsense. So, for example, if you accept that $5 + 7 = 12$, then you accept that there are numbers. That is all there is to it. You can't ask another, metaphysical question, whether 5 and 7 really exist, absolutely. Denying that there are numbers, denying that 5 is one and 7 another, is either incoherent, a proposal to do math a different way, or a way of rejecting the activity/system of math. So far the parallel to Dworkin is obvious. Now we can see what is missing in Dworkin's account. First, if moral facts really exist relative to a moral system, then where does the system itself come from? Is there anything in Dworkin's account that would persuade us that it is not manmade? Second, what is the fundamental purpose of the system? Is it to describe the world? Is it to regulate the world? If the validity of a certain version of the system is dependent on performing a task well, then what is this task? It cannot be said that it is to describe an extra-systematic, or external, moral reality, since, according the theory, this move is deemed nonsensical. Anti-realists have answers to these questions. A Rawlsian constructivist, for example, explains the system(s) in terms of a negotiation between people

seeking to arrive at a set of rules that fits with their view of themselves and fairly negotiates between their sometimes competing interests. Sure, the absolute existence of moral facts is denied, but existence of such facts *relative* to a reasonable system is as undeniable as the existence of illegal acts relative to some laws. (As we saw not even Mackie denies this.) In contrast to the Rawlsian constructivist, Dworkin simply *assumes* the system, celebrates it, and claims that it is not "manmade", not a product of "instinct, imagination and culture", but says nothing about WHO made it and to what purpose. Or is it simply there eternally and immutably? If so, then he needs an old-fashion maximalist metaphysics like that of, say, Plato or Cudworth to back it up. In the next and final section I will expand on this point and connect it to the similar deficit in Shafer-Landau's anti-reductivism and McDowell's quasi-Humean sensibility theory.

7.6 Realist Intuitions Without a Realist Theory - no Nonnaturalist Realism Without Queer Objects

All things that live long are gradually so saturated with reason that their origin in unreason thereby becomes improbable. Does not almost every precise history impress your feelings as paradoxical and wantonly offensive? (Nietzsche 1881/1982)

Consider Dworkin's complaint that

our most confident convictions about... what is beautiful or who is wicked are just our convictions, just conventions, just ideology, just badges of power, just the rules of the language games we choose to play, just the product of our irrepressible disposition to deceive ourselves that we have discovered out there in some external, objective, timeless, mind-independent world what we have actually invented ourselves, out of instinct, imagination and culture. (1996, p. 8)

In a response to Dworkin, Blackburn (1996), incredulous, asks,

Now why is it so bad to think that our convictions are just our convictions [...] ... And why so bad to think that instinct, imagination and culture play a role in determining them? 'Instinct' is not a biological category most theorists work with, but would our ethics be better if imagination and culture had no such role? Does Dworkin want unimaginative and uncultured ethics?

This is of course the right answer from the point of view of anti-realism. "Of course they are just our convictions, who else's should they be?" But it ignores that Dworkin is expressing the feeling of, as Nietzsche put it, paradox, and offends *vis-a-vis* the hypothesis that our moral beliefs are simply biological facts and historical arte-facts. Philosophers of the Hume-Darwin paradigm are, as Nietzsche wrote, discovering the origin of morality in unreason. Consider as an example a recent research linking dispositions towards feelings of disgust, to moral beliefs

about sexual morality (Inbar, Y., Pizarro, D.A., Knobe, J., & Bloom, P. 2009). The more easily you are disgusted, the more conservative your views are. Now, if you are a conservative, how is it possible to learn this, and not have your confidence a little shaken with regards to, say, the absolute wrongness of cousin marriage? If this particular fact does not shake you, other similar genealogies of your moral beliefs could have an accumulated effect of moral alienation. If the difference between you and someone with a different moral view is something that, at bottom, is entirely contingent, why take your own side so seriously? Why not take the other side? Or no side? This is the kind of destabilization that Dworkin and also Shafer-Landau is experiencing. This is why they speak of firm moral points, something, as Sartre put it, to hold on to.

Dworkin's response is to accept that there are natural histories of our moral beliefs, but to insist that this need not undercut our belief that these beliefs are *also* capturing an objective moral truth. He develops his position in response to an example of our coming to know that the (un)reason that we believe in taxing the rich, is

that it is in our self-interest (the "bleak hypothesis").³⁹

Dworkin (1996) thinks that this discovery should not undermine our conviction in its objective truth,

Why shouldn't you count it as a piece of luck -a special example of what Bernard Williams has called moral luck - that your self-interest and justice should here coincide/ you realize that you would have had a very different view if your self-interest had favored that different view instead (just as you realize now, independently of the bleak thesis, that you would have had, different views if you had been born into a different culture). But that fact alone cannot undercut your conviction about justice, and therefore about your moral luck. You have to think that something -either that you have an obligation to vote for higher taxes or that you do not -and you have no reason, just in what the bleak thesis declares, to turn your back on all the reasons...that inclined you to think that you do. You lack, so far, in other words, something that neither the bleak thesis nor any other piece of psychology can provide on its own. You lack a normative connection between the bleak psychology and any conclusion about justice, or any other conclusion about how you should vote or act. (p. 125)

Dworkin thinks that the moral realist is

in much the same state of mind as the theologians of predestination, from Augustine through Calvin, who supposed that people saw the truth only because they had been elected by God. Those theologians continued to think that they were among the elect, though they knew that people could think that they were not. (p. 22)

³⁹ Sharon Street's critique of Dworkin drew my attention to this aspect of his position.

The comparison to Calvinism is spot-on, but how is this supposed to restore our confidence? As Sharon Street correctly points out in her critique of Dworkin, a realist privy to the bleak hypothesis should "conclude that he probably did not win the normative lottery, or on his very own view of things it follows that his normative views are in all likelihood mistaken with respect to the robustly normative truth he posits" (p.18).

What has gone wrong here is that by admitting the explanation of his moral belief in terms of the "bleak hypothesis" and by extension other naturalistic precise histories, Dworkin has undermined his realist stance. Precise histories of moral judgments, are external claims, and when Dworkin is conceding them, not only does he contradict his "minimalism", but he also takes on the burden to produce an external counter claim to the effect that these beliefs are also, or can also be, formed in response to moral facts. As a philosopher once said, it is easier to disown metaphysics than to disengage from it. The very fact that Dworkin indulges the bleak hypothesis makes it tempting to reinterpret his claim that there can be no external moral claims, to mean that we don't want to hear about such claims, that such claims are offensive.

The metaphysics that seems necessary to respond to the fear of causal undermining is, one could say, "non-compatibilist". Let me explain. The discussion concerning determinism in general, offers 3 popular types of theoretical responses: hard determinism, soft-determinism/compatibilism and libertarianism. The hard determinist affirms determinism and denies that we are free; the soft determinist affirms determinism and affirms that we are free; the libertarian denies determinism and affirms that we are free. The models of Shafer-Landau, McDowell and Dworkin resemble soft determinism/compatibilism. Shafer-Landau sought to show how moral properties could be exhaustively constituted by physical properties, but *still* sui generis moral properties; McDowell sought to show how moral properties could be dependent on our contingent responses, and *still* be objective; and Dworkin accepts that moral beliefs have causal explanations, but *still* think that they fortunately also respond to moral facts.

The critique of compatibilism has always been that calling actions that were determined at the inception of universe "free" amounts to changing the meaning of freedom and succeeds only in blurring the issues. Kant (1781)

called it a "wretched subterfuge" and "word jugglery" (book 1, chapter 3). This mirrors our critique of contemporary nonnaturalist realists. In Shafer-Landau's case we wondered what happened to the content of a *sui generis* moral world telling us what to do, when this world turned out to be exhaustively constituted by physical aspects. In the case of McDowell, we found little more than a decision to call a standard Humean model "objective" and no account of how something in this model can be an objective fact of "meritness". In the case of Dworkin, there is no account of how our moral confidence is compatible with knowledge of causal genealogies of our moral beliefs.

Nonnaturalist realists with integrity should abandon compatibilism and reject the supposition that moral beliefs have complete scientific causal explanations, and accept that their theory must present an alternative route of moral belief formation. It should be a theory which allows the agent to recognize that, for example, while there is a correlation between her sensitivity to disgust, her upbringing, her postal code, her sex, and so on, and her belief that some type of behavior is wrong, she can still maintain *-with reason-* that she knows that she believes it because it is true. Kant, the nonnaturalist

anti-realist objectivist, aimed at providing such an account. And so did Plato: despite our material side we had established contact with the Good in a prior existence, and through the voices of gods. And so did Augustine who argued that God illuminates our mind so that we can know truth. And so did the Cambridge Platonists. Cudworth, for example, explained moral knowledge as a consequence of our minds mirroring the mind of God. The lesson here is that a nonnaturalist realism which properly responds to realist intuitions, and which seeks to meet the metaphysical demands of this stance, will simply have to accept some degree of "queerness". The attempts of our contemporary would-be nonnaturalist realists, brings to mind a joke made by Jerry Fodor at a talk at the CUNY Graduate Center (paraphrased from memory). A man explains how a telegraph works to a child. "Imagine a very long dachshund, its tail in New York and its nose in LA. When you pull its tail, it barks in LA. -What about radios, how do they work? the child asks. The same way, the man responds, but without the dachshund." Analogously, without the unpopular metaphysical assumptions, there is a continent size gap in the nonnaturalist realist's explanation.

Chapter 8

Is it better to believe in Moral Realism?

We have seen that recent attempts to defend non-naturalist moral realism have not been successful. This does not mean that the view cannot be defended, although, if what I have argued here is correct, it would have to involve a more mysterious metaphysics than most of its proponents are prepared to admit. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the case for nonnaturalist moral realism doesn't look promising. I will end this essay with a discussion of Dworkin's claim that we "better believe" in realism. This, if taken literally, suggests that there can be a "non-epistemic" reason to accept realism. Such a reason would not bear on the truth of the theory, but on the desirability of believing it.

8.1. Is Realism Good?

It is clear that Russ-Shafer Landau and Ronald Dworkin believe that it is *important* that moral realism is true. Not just because it's a good explanation of ethics, but because anti-realism is a corrupting influence. Shafer-

Landau (2003) strikes a note of moral urgency in the opening sentence of *Moral Realism*:

Let me begin this book of philosophy with a bit of armchair philosophy. Nowadays many people express their moral views with a great deal more hesitation than was usual in the past. We are less likely to wholeheartedly trumpet the cause of Progress, Manifest Destiny, Religion, or, indeed anything that comes with capital letters. (p.1) ... [Many people no longer have] an unwavering conviction about certain matters. (p.2)

The source of this lack of conviction is a double-headed dragon of Humean anti-realism -science is objective, norms aren't- and postmodernism/new-pragmatism -nothing is objective. Dworkin describes these ideologies as constituting a world-view according to which

our most confident convictions about... what is beautiful or who is wicked are just our convictions, just conventions, just ideology, just badges of power, just the rules of the language games we choose to play, just the product of our irrepressible disposition to deceive ourselves that we have discovered out there in some external, objective, timeless, mind-independent world what we have actually invented ourselves, out of instinct, imagination and culture. (p. 8)

The anxiety concerning the corrupting consequences of moral anti-realism is shared by many academic philosophers. Outside academia it is a recurring trope in conservative cultural criticism that "postmodern relativism" has undermined the belief in moral absolutes and corrupted society. The late Pope Benedict XVI warned that "(w)e are

moving toward a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one's own ego and one's own desires." ⁴⁰ His argument is that if there are no standards outside us, then our wishes become law. As a consequence we have a society of shallow hedonists who have replaced Family, Religion and Country, with material consumption and thrill seeking, auguring a soulless society of loneliness, divisions between generations, broken homes, abandoned mothers, a shrinking and aging population, and crime.

These are serious accusation and they present a moral argument for objectivism. Its general structure appears to be the following: if people see their moral beliefs as a constructs of "instinct, imagination and culture" rather than as representations of moral facts, then they will lose their moral convictions, and this has bad consequences. It is therefore better to believe that, while moral beliefs are influenced by contingent circumstances, they also aim at representing an objective moral truth. The argument is similar to the argument that atheists are corrupt.

⁴⁰ Then-Cardinal Ratzinger, Mass at the Vatican 18th of April 2005.

8.2 Evaluating the Moral Argument for Moral Realism

First some clarifications. In order to make the issue more manageable, let us borrow a definition from experimental philosophy (see chapter 2): the objectivist accepts, and the non-objectivist rejects, the proposition that if two people from different cultures disagree about some moral issue, then one of them must be wrong (Sarkissian et al., 2009). People are more objectivist when considering intra-cultural disagreements, than inter-cultural disagreements. Let us assume that only inter-cultural objectivism counts as objectivism. This excludes cultural relativists from the class of "objectivists". People are also more likely to be non-objectivist about *some* claims than other. For example, the more contested a claim is, the less likely people are to regard it as objective (James R. Beebe & David Sackris, 2010). Since realists often argue that they do not hold every particular moral belief to be absolute, it is reasonable to understand the "objectivist" to be someone who accepts that there is at least one absolute moral principle, and the "non-objectivist" or "relativist" to be someone who denies this.⁴¹ ⁴² The dichotomy of objectivists and relativism is

⁴¹ It should be noted that the realist/objectivist

true to how the debate is often conducted.

Arguably the objectivist side includes Kantianism, naturalist realism and nonnaturalist (including theistic) realism. This means that even if the moral argument would succeed it does not prove which kind of realism is correct. The "relativist" ("non-realist/non-objectivist") side is perhaps best thought of as including every broadly Humean account (emotivism, error theory, ideal observer theory), constructivist theories (like those of Hobbes and Rawls) existentialists, prescriptivists (like Hare), and of course, cultural relativists. The complaint is that these explanations of ethics make morality too dependent on contingent human ends. They lead their proponents and those they influence, to embrace an unhealthy moral relativism.

I will argue that it is unclear that the lives of

distinction is a different from the realist/anti-realist distinction. Realism as we have understood it is a particular form of objectivism, and anti-realism the name of every theory, including Kantian ethics which denies it. This means that even if it were successful, it would not establish a nonnaturalist realist form of objectivism.

⁴² It is unclear whether most people are folk objectivists. James R. Beebe & David Sackris, (2010) represent the standard view: "We have found that the vast majority of people endorse moral objectivism and that moral non-objectivism (relativism) appears only as a phase that some individuals go through during the period of their lives that coincides with the college years." (Abstract) For a different view see Sarkissian et al., 2009.

relativists are more corrupt and corrupting than those of objectivists. I will question the links between relativism and lack of moral commitments (8.3), lack of community values (8.4), and passivity in face of evil abroad (8.5). We lack firm evidence linking behavior to meta-ethical beliefs, and we lack clear standards for evaluating this behavior and its ramifications. I will conclude by listing eight reasons for thinking that moral higher-order beliefs are less significant for people's lives than a host of other influences, such as upbringing, personality type and various prudential considerations (8.6). My argument does not primarily concern what conclusions relativist *should* draw from their meta-ethical beliefs, but what *actual* consequences this stance appears to have. Since the moral argument concerns the consequences of relativism, this must be the right approach. My argumentative strategy is thus analogous to that of someone assessing the alleged corrupting influences of atheism, by looking at how, for example, modern Swedes live: identify signs of corruption, and then seek to link these to the rejection of God. A caveat: Shafer-Landau presented his position as an armchair observation, and although I try to use the data available, my discussion is best understood as speculative.

8.3 Objectivism, Relativism and Moral Conviction

Is it true, as Shafer-Landau writes, that "nowadays many people express their moral views with a great deal more hesitation" and that they lack "an unwavering commitment about certain matters"? The people in question must be Westerners, and the "nowadays" can reasonably be taken to refer to a period stretching back to the 1960s. It is harder to know what "many" means in the context. If the political climate in the US is any indication, then "many people" are still expressing their moral views without hesitation. It is also hard to believe that it is more acceptable today than 50 years ago for a shopkeeper to short-change his customer, for a banker to embezzle retirement funds, for an adult to molest a child, for a husband to beat a wife, or to rob, kidnap, and murder. The moral world that people live in day-to-day has remained the same in important ways.

But, of course, people's values change. It is true that more people today than 50 years ago will lack a firm conviction about "certain matters". Shafer-Landau mentions, "Progress, Manifest Destiny, Religion" and "anything that comes with capital letters." From this list, I think that people still believe in "Progress" but it appears to have a

slightly different content today, some more concerns for a sustainable ecology for example; as for "Manifest Destiny", this has not been an important concept since the 19th century, but there are still "neocons" with similar ideas; at least in the US, Religion is still alive, although it may be less central to "many". In any case, while there may have been a decline in the proportionate number of individuals who "trumpet" the just mentioned ideals, it is also true that more people than before will have *stronger* convictions about certain other matters. Consider, for example, attitudes towards homosexuality. Less people these days are certain that it is morally wrong, and more people these days are convinced that it is not morally wrong. Other, similar examples are concubinage, extra-marital sex, and polygamy. A different topic is race. More people today than 50 years ago, feel that racial discrimination is wrong. The picture then seems to be that many people still have strong moral convictions, but not about the exactly the same things as people did 50 years ago. The shift has been towards a more liberal sensibility. Westerners feel more strongly about civil rights, and less strongly about what Haidt (2007) describes as the binding values associated with the beehive model for society: Equal Pay and Racial Equality become nonnegotiable, the family

becomes a life-style choice.

8.4 Relativism, Objectivism, Liberal Tolerance

Is there then a link between relativism and liberal views on social issues? If so then a "moral conservative argument" for moral realism could be made. Such a link would be most visible in people with a clear understanding of their meta-ethical commitments. So, as a thought experiment, take all anthologies on meta-ethics and separate the class of thinkers listed as "objectivist", "realists" or "cognitivist", from the class listed as "subjectivist" or "anti-realists" or "non-cognitivists". Is it plausible to think that there would be a strong difference between the groups in their acceptance of liberal values? Probably not. Dworkin combines his objectivism with egalitarianism and with a liberal view of, for example, gay marriage. And Hume -the arch subjectivist- was a conservative. As an illustration of the fact that relativism does not exclude conservative views consider that the most common argument against gay marriage is relativist-sounding "argument from culture". Here described by Dworkin (2006):

The case against gay marriage... begins with the premise that the institution [is]... a unique and immensely valuable cultural resource. Its meaning and hence its value have developed over centuries, and the assumption that marriage is the union of a man and a woman is so embedded in our common understanding that it would become a different institution were that assumption now challenged and lost.

This argument does not rely on the view that it is a universal truth that marriage must be between a man and a woman. The underlying assumption is rather that, as Ruth Benedict argued, what is habitual is what is right. This doesn't mean those who make this argument are not also objectivists. It means that there is no reason to think that champions of liberal causes are more likely to be relativists, or that their relativism was instrumental in making them social liberals. And, adding to the uncertainty, even if this were the case, it is controversial to hold that the advancement of liberal values at the cost of beehive values -the costs Benedict XVI had in mind- was, *overall*, a bad thing. Is a world with more divorces, but with a job-market open to women, better or worse? The dominant view is to regard an open job market for women as a fundamental Right and to accept the social costs (or to pretend that there is no trade-off).

8.5 Relativism and Interventionism

Perhaps the moral argument is particularly concerned with the relationship a relativist has with people who have different moral beliefs than his. The charge is that a relativist is someone who, for example, undermines freedom of speech in Holland, accepts polygamy in Italy, and in other ways fail to "stand up" for Western values at home, while she accepts slavery, genital mutilation and other savageries abroad. This is the kind of relativist that Christopher Hitchens (2010) has in mind when he describes his struggles,

It's quite a task to combat the absolutists and the relativists at the same time: to maintain that there is no totalitarian solution while also insisting that, yes, we on our side also have unalterable convictions and are willing to fight for them. (p. 422)

Hitchens is an objectivist of the messy real-life kind. He describes himself as objectivist about certain matters relating to traditional liberal values, but not dogmatic, and less objectivist about many matters, and therefore not a totalitarian. Now, what about the fickle relativists?

There is no reason to think that meta-ethical relativism is the cause of either of the two alleged sins. These "sins" may just as well be questionable attitudes of

objectivists. Many Europeans believe, without irony, that, for example, banning "hate speech", and recognizing polygamy, follows from principles such as Freedom of Religion, Equal Respect, Tolerance and even from a *correct* interpretation of Freedom of Speech. It is not implausible that their moral objectivism is one explanation of the their strong confidence that less homogeneity in their nations is *obviously* a good thing, rather than -more philosophically- a mixed bag. They have an unshakable belief that, in the end, everyone *really* believes what is Right, in effect, what *they* believe, for example, that men and women should have equal rights. This optimism with regards to convergence is not necessarily shared by relativists. Arguments against threats to Western ways of life, in fact often take a relativist-sounding form. People make "cultural arguments" like the one we saw against gay marriage, against the acceptability polygamy in Italy, and against the "blasphemy laws" prohibiting intentionally offending religious people in Holland.⁴³ This is not

⁴³ The following is not from the satirical *The Onion*, but from the public prosecutor of Amsterdam (who is not played by John Cleese or Eric Idle in Inquisitor costume) and concerns a real trial against the Dutch politician Geert Wilders:

The aforementioned summoned person is charged with the fact that

1. he, on one or more dates in or about the period

surprising, or paradoxical. Since cultural relativists believe that a moral reality is sustained by nothing but a commonality in history and in goals, they should reasonably hold that it is essential to defend the integrity of their own moral worlds. Not because they are "correct", but because they are theirs. There is therefore no clear case against relativism on the grounds of betraying Western values. Moreover, even if we assumed, for the sake of the argument, that relativists are more likely to support "hate speech" laws, and accept the legal recognition of polygamy, it is not uncontroversial that these are, over all, bad calls. At least in the case of "hate speech" laws, most Europeans approve of them.

from 8 August 2007 up to and including 27 March 2008,
in The Hague and/or Amsterdam and/or (elsewhere in)
the Netherlands, on multiple occasions, at least once,
(each time) in public, orally, in writing or through
images, intentionally offended a group of people , i.e.
Muslims, based on their religion, by (each time)

intentionally in

- De Volkskrant and/or

- on the internet on the website www.liveleak.com (in
the film Fitna)

placing (having placed) and/or showing (having showed)

and/or having heard one or more texts and/or images

and/or footage and/or audio fragments with the

following content:... (District Court Office of the
Public Prosecutor Amsterdam)

As a neat, Orwellian twist, the judges have made clear that
the truth of his speech acts, is not a relevant defense.

But what about the second "sin", the relativist's alleged failure to prevent evil abroad? Let us approach this argument from a reverse angle. The dangers of intervening in other people's affairs on moral grounds, is often used by relativists as a "moral argument *against* objectivism." Many anti-realist philosophers think that it would be a blessing if people were less eager to wholeheartedly "trumpet the cause of Progress, Manifest Destiny, Religion, or, indeed anything that comes with capital letters." Greene, for example, believes (as we saw in chapter 2, 2.1) that "our entrenched modes of moral thought may be responsible for our failure to solve a number of global social problems" (*Abstract*, 2002). Trumpets and capital letters belong to people who are willing to take the measures necessary to impose on everyone their conception of the Platonic form of Progress, Destiny, Religion and so on. Commonsense, or not, Greene believes that realism is simply latently belligerent. He concludes that "getting rid of realist moral thought and talk, i.e. getting rid of morality, will make the world a happier, more peaceful, and more compassionate place" (2002, p. 47). Supposedly, Greene regards happiness, peace and compassion as good objectives because these are things that people actually happen to like, not because they ought

to be pursued by everyone for their own sake.

There is an intuitive case here. Not many wars have been waged over music taste, so since the relativist believes that moral beliefs are analogous to taste in music, should he not be more hesitant to go to war on moral grounds? In theory: yes. But in reality it is not so obvious. Needless to say, there is no firm link between objectivism and interventionism. Many isolationists are conservative objectivists, former president Bush used to be one of them. It also unclear what relativism entails in practice. Take Operation Iraqi Freedom. Here President Bush gives a version of his moral justification in a speech one year after the invasion: "Who would prefer that Saddam's torture chambers still be open? Who would begrudge the Iraqi people their long-awaited liberation?" Assume that this really was THE justification and cause of the war. Would a relativist President necessarily have dismissed Bush's moral reasons? It is not clear. It is entirely possible that a relativist would agree that most Iraqi's do not want Saddam's torture chambers, or gas bombings, assassination of dissidents, corruption, ecological devastation and so on. This means that the case is unlike that of, say, accepting that it would be ok to whip a drunken sailor in a culture which

accepts it. The Iraqi culture does not accept Saddam's evils. He violates *their* standards. So, the relativist could agree with Bush that an intervention is called for. Alternatively, he could argue *against* the intervention on the grounds of, say, respect for national sovereignty, but this is not a particularly "relativist" reason. Most good reasons either for or against the war are available to both relativists and objectivists.

We have assumed that the moral argument gave the true reasons for the war, but this is questionable. How many wars are in fact driven by primarily moral considerations? It is plausible to think that the effects of second-order beliefs, even if they had certain practical tendencies, would to a large degree be drowned out by non-moral considerations for war. Moreover, when it comes to the recent wars that appear to be primarily morally motivated, like Clinton's wars in Kosovo, Haiti, and Bosnia or the British campaign to end slave trade in Sudan, it is controversial that these were, overall, bad events.

The picture that has emerged is the following. There is a standard schematic understanding of different virtues and vices of the "relativist" and the "objectivist". The virtue of the relativist is that of tolerating other ways

of living, the vice of the relativist is that of tolerating the undermining of his own society, and of failure to prevent evil abroad. The virtue of the objectivist is that of defending constitutive values at home, while preventing evil abroad. The vice of the objectivist is that of intolerance at home, and moral imperialism and imposition abroad. Assuming some commonsense values, it is arguably better for someone to be/become a moral realist, if his relativism causes the vice of moral apathy. But likewise, if someone's objectivism is tending towards intolerance and totalitarianism, then he had better become a relativist. Between a virtuous relativist who allows other people to live in peace, while still caring about preventing human suffering and upholding enough binding social values, and on the other hand, a virtuous objectivist who is modest about his own powers of recognizing moral truths, humble about his right to tell other people how to live their life, and restrictive in the scope of absolutes, that is, not a totalitarian, it's, arguably, a draw. An even safer conclusion is that we don't know, what would be better. Given the complex and ambiguous relationship between beliefs about moral beliefs, first-order moral beliefs and behavior, it is impossible to say if it would be better or worse if people changed towards either objectivism or

relativism. Perhaps even harder than to say where we would be without religion.

8.6 Reasons to Doubt the Power of Meta-Ethical Beliefs

I will end this essay by consolidating this skeptical conclusion. The following are eight factors that influence people's norms and behavior. It is reasonable to suppose that they generally trump meta-ethical folk beliefs.

First, people have different temperaments, some are warmer than others, others are more generous or caring than others, etc.

Second, people's moral personality is shaped by their environment and settled long before they consider higher order questions,

Third, people like to be admired and accepted and will adopt moral stances that illicit such reactions,

Fourth, people consciously and unconsciously mimic each other,

Fifth, people are influenced by authority and peer pressure,

Sixth, people implicitly hold the Doctrine of Double Effect, and perhaps other "moral grammatical principles" (Hauser, 2006),

Seventh, people adopt the beliefs that they think their religion tells them are right.

Eight, people either conform to important prevailing standards or perish. Prudential reasons guarantee adherence to certain general norms.

The list could go on.

I conclude that there is no convincing moral argument for moral realism, and no convincing moral argument against moral realism.

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