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Naturalism and Normativity

SEIRIOL MORGAN
University of Bristol

Synthetic naturalism is a form of moral realism which holds that we can discover *a posteriori* that moral properties exist and are natural properties. On this view moral discourse earns the right to be construed realistically because it meets the conditions that license realism about any discourse, that properties it represents as existing pull their weight in empirical explanations of our observations of the world. I argue that naturalism is an inadequate metaphysics of moral value, because parallel arguments to those used by the naturalist to establish the reality of 'moral' properties and their normativity for persons of sympathetic temperament can be constructed, which would equally demonstrate the reality of normatively antagonistic value properties, and their normativity for differently psychologically constituted agents. Since moral discourse implicitly denies that there are such diverse and competing normative truths the strategy fails to establish moral realism.

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My aim in this paper is to develop a line of criticism against a position which is becoming increasingly influential in contemporary metaethics. The position is known as 'synthetic' or 'metaphysical' naturalism, and has been advocated in one form or another by a number of contemporary philosophers, including Peter Railton, David Brink, Nicholas Sturgeon, Richard Boyd, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord and Alexander Miller.[1] Synthetic naturalism claims that moral properties exist and are natural properties, properties that figure in our best natural and social scientific accounts of the nature of the world. It is therefore a substantive naturalist position and a version of moral realism. The view is known as synthetic naturalism because its substantive naturalism is

[1] See Peter Railton "Moral Realism" *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986), "Facts and Values" *Philosophical Topics* XIV (1986), "Naturalism and Prescriptivity" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 7 (1989); David Brink *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Nicholas Sturgeon "Moral Explanations", in David Copp and David Zimmerman (ed.) *Morality, Reason and Truth* (Rowman and Allenfeld: New Jersey, 1984), reprinted in Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (ed.) *Essays on Moral Realism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988); Richard Boyd "How To Be A Moral Realist", in Sayre-McCord (ed.) *Essays in Moral Realism*, op. cit.; Geoffrey Sayre-McCord "Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence", in *Essays in Moral Realism*, op. cit.; Alexander Miller *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (London: Polity, 2003), ch. 9.

taken by its proponents to emerge *a posteriori* from a more fundamental methodological naturalism, which is a view about the appropriate procedures to use when drawing conclusions in philosophy. Methodological naturalism is motivated by a respect for the manifest successes of the natural sciences in advancing human knowledge- successes which include demonstrations that various conclusions which philosophy had supposedly established to be true *a priori* are in fact false- and is the view that philosophical investigation should proceed *a posteriori* in tandem with the investigations of the empirical sciences. So in ethics, as in any other area of philosophy, methodological naturalism enjoins an empirical investigation of the natural world, including its social and psychological facets, in an attempt to locate the properties which the grammar of our moral language represents as existing. Over the result of such an investigation, naturalists of this stripe are divided. Some conclude that no such properties can be found, but that it is possible to provide a vindication of moral practice, since investigation of what we do when we use moral language licenses a construal of moral claims not as aiming and failing to represent the world, but as doing something different, for instance expressing attitudes of approbation or condemnation. They are the expressivists. Others equally deny that genuine moral properties exist, and conclude that the extent of the commitment of moral discourse to moral facts is such that we are obliged to construe its claims as systematically false. These are the error theorists. Synthetic naturalists by contrast argue that empirical enquiry demonstrates that such properties do in fact exist.[2]

According to the naturalist, moral properties 'earn the right' to be included in a naturalist ontology, since they meet the criterion which we take to license the realistic construal of any discourse. This is the requirement that the properties 'pull their weight' in explanations of our experience, or else are reducible to properties that do. A property that pulls its weight in an empirical explanation is one that cannot be eliminated without explanatory loss, since were it to be so we would find ourselves unable to explain or explain as effectively phenomena which we could explain by appeal to the property in question. For example, consider psychological facts. We are inclined to give psychological discourse about beliefs, desires and the like a realist construal, because we need to appeal to them in order to explain the phenomenon of human action. Were we to cease to use psychological concepts such as these we would not be able to predict and explain the behavior of human beings anything like as effectively as we do now. That is why we are licensed to take psychological states to be real things existing in the world, and our talk about each others' psychological states as aiming to track facts about these states obtaining independently of our beliefs about whether they obtain or

[2] Hereafter I will abbreviate 'synthetic naturalism' to 'naturalism', and so to avoid confusion I will refer to any other version of naturalism I might mention by its full name.

not. According to naturalists, moral properties figure in just this kind of way in our explanations of the workings of the social world, on both the micro and macro levels. For instance, naturalists like Sturgeon and Sayre-McCord have argued that there are observable regularities between moral properties of individuals' characters and actions, such as honesty and fairness, and human behavior identifiable in non-moral terms, for instance trust and allegiance.[3] Similarly, Brink and Railton have argued that phenomena such as social stability and change can only be properly explained with reference to the justice or injustice of a society's rules and institutions.[4] Unsurprisingly, various discrete positions exist under the broad naturalist rubric, and in particular naturalists are split over whether a reduction of moral properties to some independently identifiable type of natural property is possible, or whether moral properties are irreducible natural properties, constituted by non-moral natural properties but forming a type which can only be identified in moral terms. Railton and Miller take the former view, whereas those naturalists usually referred to as the 'Cornell realists', who include Boyd, Sturgeon and Brink, the latter. But despite the differences, they are all engaged in a recognizable project, of carrying through in the area of ethics "the generic strategy of naturalistic realism... to postulate a realm of facts in virtue of the contribution they would make to the *a posteriori* explanation of features of our experience."[5]

On the face of it synthetic naturalism seems to have a lot going for it. Its putative realist credentials offer the promise of giving our moral judgments the kind of objective grounding we naturally take them to have, underwriting the cognitive grammar of moral discourse and so avoiding the Frege-Geach problem, and so on. In arguing *a posteriori* for the metaphysical identity of moral and natural properties it sidesteps Moore's Open Question Argument against analytic naturalism, which was widely thought for much of the last century to have delivered a knockout blow to ethical naturalism as such.[6] And naturalism seems to offer a number of significant advantages over the non-naturalist realism of Moore and his followers. Historically, a major motivation for the rejection of moral realism has been the thought that realists about moral facts are obliged to endorse untenable views in epistemology or metaphysics or both. Metaphysically, realism has been supposed to be committed to the existence of unacceptably 'queer' entities, properties which have no

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3 Sayre-McCord "Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence", op. cit., p. 276.

4 Brink *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, op. cit., pp. 186-197; Railton "Moral Realism", op. cit., pp. 195-200.

5 Railton "Moral Realism", op. cit., pp. 171-172.

6 G. E. Moore *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 12-17. See e.g. Brink "Realism, Naturalism and Moral Semantics", in Ellen Paul, Fred Miller and Jeffrey Paul (ed.) *Moral Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

place in any respectable post-scientific-revolution ontology.[7] And epistemologically ethics has frequently been supposed to compare most unfavorably with our paradigm truth-apt discourses, those of the natural sciences.[8] But there is obviously nothing metaphysically queer about natural properties, and naturalism argues that we discover that moral properties exist in just the same way as we discover non-moral facts about the world. Hence, according to naturalism, ethics is epistemologically on a par with the natural and social sciences. And, indeed, naturalism makes a powerful and elegant case for moral realism. Nevertheless I am going to argue that, despite its initial promise, the program is eventually disappointing. In particular I will claim that, although natural properties cannot be thought of as metaphysically queer in themselves, naturalism is a very queer metaphysics of morals. Natural properties just do not possess the right characteristics to be the metaphysical basis for realism about morality, since the metaphysics of value that emerges from the naturalist account of the reality of moral properties is wildly at odds with some of our firmest beliefs about morals, and this fatally undermines the significance of any 'moral realism' that naturalism might seem to succeed in establishing.

2

Much of the debate about naturalism's prospects has revolved around the issue of moral explanations, with a number of critics contesting the claim that moral properties genuinely pull their weight in explanations of our observations of the world. Famously, for example, Gilbert Harman has argued that we do not need to appeal to moral facts to explain the moral observations that we make, since appeal to psychological facts concerning our beliefs that moral facts obtain will explain just as much. Hence moral facts are not required as part of the best explanation of our making the moral judgments we do.[9] More recently, Brian Leiter has challenged some specific claims advanced by naturalists about observable regularities between the moral and the non-moral, for instance that there are reliable connections between honesty and trust, or justice and allegiance.[10] I will not take sides in this debate here, because I take a different problem to be more fundamental, one that stems from the naturalist account of morality's normativity.

Attacks on naturalism focusing on this issue are of course already present in the literature. For instance David Copp has pointed out that the need to invoke some fact in an explanation cannot possibly show that it is good that the fact obtains. Since justification is what morality is all about, and the

7 John Mackie *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 38-42.
8 Bernard Williams *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), ch. 8.
9 *The Nature of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), ch. 1.
10 "Moral Facts and Best Explanations", in Paul, Miller and Paul (ed.) *Moral Knowledge*, op. cit.

explanatory potency of properties is irrelevant to justification, Copp concludes that explanatory potency is irrelevant to the issue of moral realism.[11] But such attacks have typically been brushed aside by naturalists as missing the point, since they rest on the mistaken assumption that naturalists take the issue of the normativity of moral properties to be settled by establishing their reality. Actually, however, naturalists appeal to explanatory potency to establish the reality of moral properties, and then to other factors to show that the moral facts are normative for us, so that *ceteris paribus* we have reason to perform moral actions, support moral institutions and so on. As Leiter puts it, dismissing Copp's paper in a paragraph:

> Those who make the charge of 'irrelevance' claim that the explanatory potency of properties simply does nothing to show whether the properties are moral; these philosophers argue that moral properties 'justify' or 'guide action,' rather than 'explain.' This complaint, however, misunderstands the explanatory requirement. Moral realists who invoke explanatory considerations are concerned only with the *reality* of moral properties, not their *morality*; thus the claim is not (*contra* philosopher David Copp) that moral theories are 'confirmable' on explanatory grounds. Which properties are the 'moral' properties- as opposed to which properties are real- will have to be answered on other grounds. Railton, for example, suggests that we will need to draw on 'our linguistic or moral intuitions' in order to pick out natural properties that 'express recognizable notions of goodness and rightness.' The irrelevance complaint, then, simply misconstrues the point of the debate over moral explanations.[12]

Leiter is quite right here in my view. Any charge that explanatory potency "represents a mistaken conception of moral justification" must miss its target, since explanatory potency was never meant to be a justificatory criterion at all.[13]

Copp's mistake lies in his neglect of the fact that the naturalist strategy for defending moral realism is one with two components. As I did earlier, he quotes Railton's statement that the generic strategy of naturalistic realism is "to postulate a realm of facts in virtue of the contribution they would make to the *a posteriori* explanation of features of our experience."[14] But he seems to think that this is a statement that success in such an endeavor would in itself amount to the success of the naturalistic strategy in the realm of morality. This is to jump to an unwarranted conclusion, since Railton is merely telling us what the central component of the naturalistic strategy is for every discourse in which it might be used. He is not making and is not committed to any further claim that it is a complete statement of the strategy for any particular discourse. In fact Railton denies that it is a complete account of the naturalistic approach to moral discourse, since according to him in a normative discourse such as the moral the naturalist must also provide us with "a

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11 David Copp "Explanation and Justification in Ethics" *Ethics* 100 (1990).

12 "Moral Facts and Best Explanations", op. cit., p. 89.

13 Copp "Explanation and Justification in Ethics", op. cit., p. 243.

14 "Explanation and Justification in Ethics", op. cit., p. 240.

plausible synthesis of the normative and the empirical."[15] To do so the naturalist must show that the property which empirical enquiry has identified as pulling its weight in *a posteriori* explanations can be appropriately identified as a moral property, and this must be done at least in part by showing that the property occupies a normative role that justifies the claim that it is picked out by a normative discourse such as morality. In particular, it must be a property which the naturalist can show is one "which, through identifiable psychological processes, could engage people motivationally in the ways characteristic of moral properties."[16]

All the synthetic naturalists agree on the need for the second component of the project, and that any putative naturalism that failed to carry it through would not have vindicated moral realism. Their attempts to discharge this obligation differ in various ways, as is to be expected, but all of their accounts of normativity are externalist about the connection between moral facts and our reasons for action. On their view, although there has to be a connection between moral facts and those reasons, otherwise the action-guiding character of morality would not have been accounted for, that connection is external and contingent. The connection exists, and hence morality is normative for us- that is, for most human beings, at least most of the time- because we are conatively so constituted that moral action is all things considered the best way for us to satisfy our desires and express our sentiments. This species of externalism is known as 'anti-rationalism', and is the inevitable result of bringing together a straight-forwardly Humean account of moral psychology and normative reasons with an anti-Humean realist metaphysics of morals. According to Hume, no belief about a matter of fact can of itself rationally compel us to adopt a particular attitude towards it or take any action in respect of it, since the cognitive mental states through which we apprehend the world are motivationally inert. Since beliefs are inert in this way our motives are all a function of the other central class of mental states, the Passions, comprising the desires and emotions. On Hume's view this means that our reasons are also rooted in passion, broadly conceived, since nothing could be a reason for us if we could not in principle be motivated to act upon it. This is why it is "not contrary to Reason to prefer the destruction of the entire world to the scratching of my finger"; it is only because we happen to desire very powerfully that the world not be destroyed that we have reason to prefer a state of affairs in which we end up with scratched fingers to one in which the world is annihilated.[17] But naturalists of course argue that there are moral facts which are natural states of affairs, and hence naturally are

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15 Railton "Moral Realism", op. cit., p. 163.

16 Peter Railton "Reply to David Wiggins", in John Haldane and Crispin Wright (ed.) *Reality, Representation and Projection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 317.

17 Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature* 2.3.3. P.H. Nidditch (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 413-418.

cognitivists about moral judgment. Since judgments that facts obtain are beliefs, and beliefs cannot motivate, and we cannot have any reason for action without some motive, the moral facts do not of themselves give us any reason for action. Importantly, then, it is precisely because they all *agree* with Copp's main observation that the naturalists are anti-rationalists. Since they accept that a property's explanatory potency can only ever provide one with a reason for believing in its existence, they readily concede that explanatory potency can never by itself provide anyone with a reason for action. So it cannot by itself establish normativity, which must be established some other way.

The basic naturalist strategy for carrying through the second component of the project is by now quite familiar, and itself consists of two parts. First, they aim to give us an account of the nature of moral properties which allows us to pick them out without relying on any internalist consideration. Their claim is that the meaning of 'moral' is fixed directly by the content rather than the function of the concept. According to Brink, for instance, the notion of moral rightness entails universality, impartiality, the promotion of well-being and the like. So by identifying those actions which promote well-being impartially, we identify acts with the property of moral rightness.[18] Second, having picked the properties out, the strategy is to argue that human beings in general have as central elements of their motivational profiles factors which would motivate them under conditions of suitably idealized instrumental deliberation to regulate their actions accordingly, and thus have reason to act morally.[19] Other-regarding motives such as sympathy are natural to human beings, and through moral education and instrumental reflection on our natural other-regarding desires we can be brought to develop a plethora of further desires and emotions which provide us with such reasons, in particular to take account of the requirements of justice. For those of us in whom such concerns are less well developed, bald self-interest frequently gives us reason to promote social conditions in which people in general subscribe to moral standards, and the development of personal dispositions to act morally is often rationally required as a contribution to the maintenance of such conditions. Since we have both effective structures of moral education, and social sanctions which can make immoral behavior exceedingly costly, most of us have indeed developed such motives. Hence the naturalist argues that the action-guiding character of morality is both explained and justified.

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Nevertheless I think there are serious problems with this approach to the issue of the practicality of morality. In my view Copp's paper contains a

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18 Brink "Moral Motivation" *Ethics* 108 (1997), p. 21 (footnote).

19 Railton "Moral Realism", op. cit., pp. 173-183.

very important insight, one that has become obscured because the misdirection of his argument has allowed naturalists to swiftly dismiss it as confused. I aim therefore to offer a modified restatement of the argument which captures its essence without falling into its errors. As it turns out, the externalist account of normativity put forward as the second component of the naturalist project cannot in the end resolve the difficulty for naturalism that Copp apparently saw but failed to properly articulate. Or so I will argue. For ease of exposition I address first the general position defended by the Cornell realists, since my case can be leveled most straightforwardly against them, but parallel arguments can be constructed against reductionism, as I indicate later on.

The basic problem is this. Non-reductive naturalists hold that we are justified in taking a set of putative properties to be real if and only if they play a role in the best explanations we have of our making the observations of the world that we do. On this view, then, any value discourse whose terms feature ineliminably in our best explanations of the things we observe must be construed realistically. The Cornell realists then of course go on to argue that moral terms figure ineliminably in such explanations, and it is partly on this basis that moral realism is established, along with the claim that there are agents for whom the properties so featuring are normative. But if we take this as the criterion for a realist construal of a value discourse then we face unexpected and unwelcome consequences for the metaphysics of value. Essentially it opens the floodgates, threatening to compel us to admit into reality a potentially unlimited number of alien and possibly abhorrent value properties, on the grounds that they figure ineliminably in the best explanations of observed facets of the world which are of particular interest to those making their observations from a perspective structured by rather different concerns to our own.

To illustrate this let me borrow and expand an idea from Copp. Consider a value perspective such as that usually associated with Nietzsche. The Nietzschean agent values psychological strength, creativity, artistic excellence, political success and the will to mold the world in one's own image whatever the cost to others. Meanwhile he scorns conformity, sympathy, pity and the like, and in general holds the values endorsed from within the moral perspective in particular contempt.[20] Without making any normative concessions to the Nietzschean, I'll collectively dub those ends valued from the Nietzschean perspective 'nobility', and those ends inimical to them 'degeneracy'. What then is the metaphysical status of 'noble values'? According to

[20] Copp, "Explanation and Justification in Ethics", op. cit. pp. 247-248. The question of whether the historical Nietzsche actually endorsed the values generally ascribed to him is irrelevant to my argument here, though as a matter of fact I think he did. See e.g. *On the Genealogy of Morals* II 2; *Beyond Good and Evil* section 7; *The Will to Power* 943 ff.

the criteria for realism endorsed by the Cornell realist, if there are phenomena for which the best explanation involves the postulation of 'noble properties', and there are agents for whom nobility is normative, then noble properties exist as value properties, and 'noble realism' is true. If so, these noble facts would be natural facts, composed of or supervening upon non-noble natural facts, or else identical with such facts.

To see how such explanations may be available to those concerned to demonstrate the existence of natural but non-moral value properties, we need to look in more detail at the kind of moral explanation the naturalists have in mind. Actually, it has be said that there is not a great deal in the literature by way of detailed examples of the alleged explanatory potency of moral properties, since the Cornell realists have been rather more concerned with outlining the contours of the naturalist moral realism that would follow from the explanatory indispensability of the moral than with showing that such an appeal to moral reality is indeed indispensable. But we can draw on the suggestions they make and try to flesh the explanations out somewhat. It is clear for instance that both Sturgeon and Brink think that, at least in some cases, social phenomena such as civil and political unrest cannot be properly explained without appeal to the injustice of the governments, practices and institutions which are the target of the unrest. Indeed, since these institutions are sometimes overthrown as a direct result of the unrest they bring about, their immorality is sometimes the root cause of their own destruction. Conversely of course, *ceteris paribus*, social stability, harmony and contentment will be the result of just and fair institutions and practices. An example cited by Sturgeon is the alleged need to cite the immorality of slavery in explanation of its abolition in the USA in the nineteenth century; Brink claims that the injustice of apartheid led to the protests and boycotts against it by both oppressed blacks and sympathetic whites, and ultimately the widespread opposition and unrest that led to its collapse.[21]

Let us grant for the sake of argument that reasonably regular correlations can be identified between such things as the political institutions of apartheid and sociological phenomena of the kind mentioned. This does not seem to me implausible, on the face of it; in any case if no such regularities are observable then naturalism is sunk. What is the mechanism through which such a correlation is supposed to come about? To some extent moral beliefs will have a part to play in the story. But they cannot play the fundamental role. Any attempt to base the fundamentals of a *moral* explanation on moral beliefs would play into the hands of the skeptic, since it is perfectly possible for moral beliefs to exist and be explanatorily potent in the absence of moral facts. After all, false beliefs are just as important in explaining the actions of

[21] Sturgeon "Moral Explanations", op. cit., p. 245; Brink *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, op. cit., pp. 187.

those who hold them as true ones. The Cornell realists are therefore careful to insist that unjust institutions are perfectly capable of bringing about observable sociological effects even in the absence of belief in the injustice of those institutions, and indeed that where they occur the existence of the moral beliefs themselves is frequently the result of the causal power of moral properties:

> (T)here will be cases where the causal efficacy and explanatory power of moral facts precede their recognition. Because, perhaps, of prevailing ideology I may regard my society as basically just, but its laws and institutions are, in fact, unjust. In particular, they deprive members of my class of significant social goods and opportunities in a systematic, if ideologically disguised, way. Though still under the belief that my society is basically just and that people are responsible for their own social positions, I begin to feel (unreflective) resentment about my own social position. I also begin to sympathize with other disadvantaged members of my class as I get to know them and their circumstances. In time, I begin to reflect on this resentment and sympathy and to examine the comparative social position of people in my class and its explanation. This reflection eventually produces the belief that my society is fundamentally unjust, and this in turn leads me to engage in social protest of various kinds. Here, social injustice seems to explain both the feelings I experienced before acquiring a belief in the injustice of this society and, of course, the development of this belief. So even if there is nothing wrong with citing my moral beliefs as part of the explanation of my subsequent protest activities, this belief cannot explain my early nonmoral psychological changes or the change in my moral consciousness.[22]

As the above quotation makes clear, then, the naturalists hold that the fundamental mechanism bringing about the sociological phenomena in question is the human motivational system, as it interacts with socio-political conditions of a particular moral character. The particulars of the story begin with the claim that it is a matter of empirical fact that human beings in general are replete with a plethora of other-regarding motives, which form a constellation with something like sympathy as Hume understood it at its heart. Generally we take pleasure in the happiness and good fortune of others, and are pained by their suffering and misfortune, whoever those others are. Consequently we are so constituted that by and large we are motivated to give our support to persons and institutions which aim to promote human well-being impartially. Decency moves us, simply because we have an affection for it. In addition, moral social relations provide most people with a powerful sense of security which they greatly desire; thus morality appeals to the self-interested motives of the masses as well. Hence people are motivated in a variety of ways to support the moral, and sometimes to promote and defend it with intense fervor; more usually, they show a welcoming acquiescence, happily cooperating with moral persons, laws, and institutions. (This is in large part why there is a regular correlation between justice and social stability.) All

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[22] Brink *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, op. cit., p. 189. See also Railton "Moral Realism", op. cit., p. 192.

these are just contingent facts about the motivations of human beings. There could have been ape-descended intelligent creatures very like ourselves who generally felt disgust for the weak, contempt for those who allow themselves to be dominated, and so on. If there had been, morality would not have had the causal consequences in their behavior that it does in ours. Nevertheless, because the general facts about human desires and emotions in the real world are as they are, there are regular observable effects brought about in the actions they motivate, both individually and collectively.

Conversely, of course, we are moved in different ways by our encounters with immorality. The failure of individuals or institutions to concern themselves about the welfare of certain groups generates resentment, most immediately in those on the receiving end of the injustice, but also, due to our general sympathetic temperament, in others. Resentment can be a very powerful motive, and it is quite unsurprising that when it occurs it regularly brings about action; nor then is it surprising that given its prevalence as a response to unfairness, any such unfairness is likely to bring about macrosociological effects. Once again, the correlation is entirely contingent on our happening to have the desires and feelings we do. Although for things to be otherwise would seem bizarre and unnatural to those of us who possess the sensibility, ultimately it is just a brute fact about us that we are made unhappy by finding ourselves relatively worse-off than other people, materially or otherwise, and that this unhappiness turns to resentment when the inequality results from partial favoritism, whether consciously and deliberately in the choices of individuals or through often unconsciously discriminatory institutions. Similarly that we sympathize with people in this position. But, since these are facts, we can be confident that when we encounter a situation where people have been treated unfairly, *ceteris paribus* they will possess various motivations associated with their resentment of this, and that *ceteris paribus* those motivations will express themselves in actions which collectively bring about identifiable social phenomena. And if the inequalities had not been unjust, *ceteris paribus* they would not have been resented, and consequently social discord would not have occurred.[23] Hence moral facts are indispensable to sociological explanation, the Cornell realist will argue. Obviously if all this is the case it was entirely to be expected that the apartheid regime's manifest partiality in its distribution of

[23] Any naturalistic explanation making appeal to value properties will have to be hedged with *ceteris paribus* clauses such as these. But this should not be taken to cast doubt upon the claim that they are genuinely explanatory, since it generalizes across the social sciences. The claim for instance that there is a causal connection between drug addiction and crime is not impugned by the concession that in certain circumstances the connection can be sundered, for example if families and communities provide support, or drugs are prescribed free to addicts.

benefits both material and political to its citizens should have brought about the unrest that helped eventually to topple it.

We can now show how the strategy by which the naturalists aim to establish the reality of moral properties can be duplicated for non-moral values. Moral properties on this account bring about their causal effects through their interaction with human motives. But the human motivational system is extensive and complex, and if particular motives arise in people in response to the morality of persons or institutions with which they interact, other motivational states exist which are engaged by non-moral properties of persons and institutions, in a manner similarly liable to generate regular observable effects. On the naturalist account of what a value property is, if there are individuals for whom such properties are normative then they are value properties, just as moral properties are. For illustration, let us return to our Nietzschean, who claims that there are really existing noble properties. Fully grasping the content of the concept 'noble' will be difficult for those of us immersed in the moral perspective, since we must expect nobility to be a *sui generis* natural property that is tracked by a normative outlook quite alien to our own. Hence it will be a property which is likely to have largely escaped our attention; even if it turned out to be reducible to some non-moral natural property or cluster of properties this is also likely to be the case. But we can get enough of a grip on the notion to work with, by reflecting on what we know from Nietzsche's works of his project for the revaluation of values, and the kinds of people he admired.

Noble individuals are courageous, self-disciplined, self-confident, unconflicted by doubts or guilt. Their tastes are refined; they have a willingness to be cruel when the achievement of excellence or their personal projects make it warranted, and a readiness to despise the worthless and the unimportant. These are the men who impose their wills upon the world and leave behind their mark upon it, the people in whom the creative force of the human will to power has freest rein. At the social level, a noble society will be one in which social, economic and political power is held by an aristocratic class composed of individuals amongst whom the aforementioned psychological make-up is prominent. The kind of society in question would naturally be arranged so that its economic output is geared towards sustaining that class in privilege and leisure, a leisure to be utilized for the cultivation of the qualities of character, personal power and success, artistic refinement and so on valued from the noble perspective. Of course, since everyone agrees that the organization of such a society would not be in the interests of the majority of people who comprise it, central facets of its internal operations must be aimed at stifling the self-assertion of the masses. These would include: the extension of strong social and economic inducements to members of a non-aristocratic class whose primary function is to crush resistance with violence; the deliber-

ate propagation of ignorance, falsehood and delusion amongst plebeians; bribery through patronage; a public discourse of natural hierarchy and xenophobia; laws enshrining power for the aristocracy, and the altar and the executioner for the rest; the immediate and savage repression of dissent, with spectacular and draconian public punishments for dissenters, and so on. Societies along these lines do indeed appear to have existed in various places at various times- one thinks of Renaissance Italy, aristocratic France, feudal Japan and various other examples, some of them explicitly commended by Nietzsche.

Let us focus on one particular facet of nobility, the quality of ruthlessness, which I will take to be the willingness to single-mindedly promote one's personal ends and values, whatever the cost to those who do not share them. Ruthlessness seems to be noble in various ways. For one thing it is an important precondition for the achievement of other noble goals. For instance, the aristocrat will not carry through a project- say, of advancing the prestige of his capital through the construction of a series of magnificently innovative and awe-inspiring public buildings- if he is spending his money on alleviating the miseries of the poor of its slums, either because he is touched by their plight, or because he fails to successfully resist the demands of the vulgar for the redistribution of his wealth. But it is also clearly noble in its own right, since this single-mindedness of purpose just is one of the things that is most admirable about the noble agent on Nietzsche's account of him. Is ruthlessness a naturalistically respectable property then? It seems to me that the Nietzschean can make a strong case that it is. Suppose the aristocratic class ruling our noble society were to begin to fall victim to slavish qualities such as sympathy, or a sense that human beings as such are fundamentally of equal value. To the extent to which this happens they will come to lose the psychological strength to inflict upon the disobedient the kind of punishments which are most effective in maintaining fear; of course, this just is to cease to be properly ruthless. With a gradual reduction in fear and its associated awe over time, we can expect to see social change. Plebeians will become more assertive, dangerous ideas will spread, more members of the aristocracy themselves risk corruption, and so on. All this could easily lead to a fundamental change in the society's power relations and eventually to the overthrow of the ruling class.

It is not at all difficult to imagine the Nietzschean proposing just such an explanation of actual historical events. Consider the French Revolution. What brought about the transition from a society approximating to the one I have been describing to one with a totally different set of people in charge, committed in name at least to ideals of universal emancipation? Our Nietzschean might well cite as a crucial factor the loss of grip by the members of the aristocracy, due to a decadent lack of self-discipline and a growing

unwillingness to assert their dominance, with aristocrats wallowing in the anesthesia of pleasure as their world increasingly crumbled around them. This is degeneracy, of course, so the parallels between moral and noble explanation should now be clear. Decency moves us, through affection, and this psychological effect brings about observable regularities at the macro-sociological level. But ruthlessness also moves us, this time through fear, but no less reliably and with similar observable consequences. So in the noble case once again the human motivational system is the mechanism which brings about the observed sociological regularity, again as it interacts with socio-political conditions, though this time of a decidedly non-moral character. If the aristocracy had not ceased to be ruthless and gradually become degenerate, then *ceteris paribus* the populace would have remained cowed, and the system of class dominance would not have been overthrown. Degeneracy at least in part explains political emancipation, then, and conversely nobility explains the stability of certain hierarchical societies. (Surely, no aristocrat with any guts would have merely ordered his servants, upon being mocked by Voltaire, to beat the philosopher. He would have had him crucified upside down in the center of Paris, before feeding the body to his dogs, along with anyone else who read his books or defended his opinions. Nor would an aristocracy with any guts have batted an eyelid when he did so.)

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So it looks as though the Cornell realists are committed to affirming the truth of noble realism as well as moral realism, and indeed any other value realism for which potent explanations are available. And this looks on the face of it like a great embarrassment to them. But we need to be clear about the nature of the embarrassment. One might think that the problem is one of ontological multiplication, that Cornell realism requires us to fill up the world with all manner of weird properties that no-one sensible thinks exist, just because persons with deviant values need to make use of them in explaining the unpleasant things they care about. But there is no metaphysical embarrassment as such, since there is no metaphysical incompatibility between moral and noble properties. All the moral facts and all the noble facts can be true together; indeed, sometimes a moral fact and a noble fact (or more likely an ignoble fact) can be one and the same fact. For example, precisely those facts about a society's institutions which explain increasing levels of preference satisfaction amongst the masses would be facts both about their morality and their degeneracy. Nor, from the metaphysical point of view, are we being asked to believe in some new kind of fact when we are asked to believe in noble facts. Noble facts have exactly the same characteristics as moral facts. They are constituted by non-moral natural facts, and explain judgments made from a particular evaluative perspective, and social

phenomena of interest to persons viewing the world with that normative outlook. Thus they are both members of a broader class of evaluative facts, facts about states of affairs which have normative significance for individuals of particular conative natures, whose status as facts is guaranteed by their explanatory potency. Hence if it does not involve any unreasonable modification of our metaphysical picture to accept that moral facts as conceived by the naturalist exist, nor will it to admit that noble facts do, and the suggestion that the explanatory criterion entails ontological multiplication should not be seen as a metaphysical problem.

The real embarrassment is that these putative explanations make painfully clear the arbitrariness at the heart of this kind of externalist value realism, an arbitrariness incompatible with the essence of moral realism as we usually understand it. Once again, we need to state the nature of this arbitrariness carefully. It is not that there is no determinate answer for any individual deliberating about what she should do, so that any action she decides to perform is as good as any other. On the naturalist account of normativity, an individual has reason to act morally if she has a motivational profile which contains appropriate sympathetic desires and feelings, or else self-interested concerns which because of contractualist considerations are best secured by the individual acting morally, or most likely a mixture of the two. Granted that she has the desires she has, it is a fact that she has reason to act morally. It is made true by these quite contingent properties of the agent, but it is a fact nevertheless, one that cannot be changed by any random whim or radical choice. But since there are (or even could be) agents with quite different desires, *nobility is normative as well*. Not for nice people like you and me, but for people who long to rule, people who take human refinement to be more important than human need, people who worship the will to power. People like the Chevalier de Rohan, perhaps, or at least a gutsier version of him. And from their point of view, its normativity is just as fixed as the normativity of morality is for the sympathetic and the 'weak'. Indeed, on the naturalist picture its normativity for them is a fact from any point of view. So if explanatory considerations are taken to establish the reality of morality, they will in so doing have merely established the reality of one of a number of coexisting and competing real value systems, none of which has any intrinsic normative superiority. Since the normativity of any one of them for any individual rests if it exists at all in the desires and feelings she happens to have, nothing about that value system makes it of its nature any more choiceworthy than any other.

This is the arbitrariness, and from certain value perspectives it may not be thought too problematic. In fact Nietzsche himself appears quite unconcerned by it, cheerfully conceding that the slaves and other moral milksop lowlife have reason to live in a slavelike way, and no reason to try to live in a noble

way. For one thing, the noble life is quite beyond us. "The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd...", he insists.[24] But such arbitrariness is seriously at odds with the moral perspective. For it is an integral part of the claim of the moral perspective that it is a normatively privileged perspective. The moral perspective presents the values it champions as universally compelling standards. It is anathema to it to accept that they are normative only for certain kinds of people, and that everyone else is well advised to ignore its demands, even if those for whom it is normative are in a substantial majority. From the moral perspective, an agent's desires do not provide him or her with a rationale for repudiating morality. Rather, moral obligations require agents to restrain and if possible eliminate their desires to act in ways which violate its dictates. Morality casts judgment on inclination, rather than inclination on morality. Consequently moral realism has standardly been understood as the position that there are facts of the matter to which our judgments of value *as such* must answer, that these facts vindicate the judgments made from the moral perspective, and that any judgments of value which fail to accord with the facts will be in error. On this understanding of it, if someone decided to pursue a life aimed at the domination of others, to do so would be wrong and that life would exemplify an erroneous conception of value, whatever the person living that life might feel about it.

Moreover, naturalists themselves can be seen talking of moral realism as if this is the conception of it to which they subscribe. For example, Brink says:

> (Moral realism's) intuitive appeal derives, I think, from the way it explains the point and nature of moral inquiry. In moral arguments and deliberation, it seems, we are trying to ***discover* what sorts of things are valuable**, praiseworthy or obligatory. We *recognize* moral requirements, and if we are sensitive to moral requirements, they *constrain* our will and our conduct. We think people can be morally *mistaken* and some people are morally more *perceptive* than others.[25]

But the naturalist conception of moral realism does not entitle us to all that. The reality of natural moral properties could not tell us what to value, since noble realism is established by the same considerations and nobility is normatively incompatible with morality. And if their reality cannot tell us what to value, it is hard to see how the truth of moral realism could enable us to "discover what sorts of things are valuable." It would of course allow us to discover what sorts of things are *moral*, but that is a very different matter if morality is conceived of as naturalists do, since it will allow us to discover what sorts of things are noble as well, without providing us with any guidance as to which we should pursue. Similarly with the notion of moral error.

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[24] *The Will to Power* 287. Translated by Walter Kaufman and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968). See also *On the Genealogy of Morals* I. 13.

[25] Brink *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, op. cit., pp. 7-8; my bold emphasis.

The natural understanding of the idea is that when people are in moral error they are mistaken *simpliciter*, and the reason they are mistaken is that they have failed to take account of some moral requirement upon them. But naturalists cannot understand the idea in this way. The only conceptions of moral error of which they can make sense are those of a person who is attempting to make a moral judgment, and makes a judgment that the moral facts are such and such when they are not, and of an individual who possesses a motivational profile such that moral action would in fact best express her attitudes, although she thinks otherwise. But these are both too thin to do the work we need the idea to do.

Consider the way the possibility of moral error is appealed to as a standard anti-expressivist argument. According to the argument, we think it a possibility that we are in significant or even global error about morality, however unlikely this might be. We think this because we know of groups of people, even entire cultures, who we think have succumbed to just this kind of error about morality, for example the Nazis. The expressivist is supposed to have difficulty accommodating this idea, since according to expressivism our moral judgments are expressions of our attitudes, and whereas it is clear that we could be in significant error about mind-independent facts, it seems difficult to make sense of the idea that we could be in significant error about how we feel about things. Hence, it is concluded, only realism can accommodate a strongly-held intuition.[26]

But what might we be wrong about? The natural response would appeal to such things as 'how one ought to live' or 'what one should do'. But the naturalist cannot appeal to these considerations to give an account of the nature of the error, because they presuppose that a moral requirement is a reason for action, and this of course is denied by externalist anti-rationalism. But if no appeal to a reason for action can be made, what licenses our interpretation of the agent's allegedly mistaken practical judgments as mistaken moral judgments, rather than judgments which track some different kind of value, such as nobility? On the naturalist picture it starts to look as though people making divergent value judgments might not be disagreeing about the moral facts, but rather making judgments focusing on separate sets of facts that they variously happen to be interested in. We want to say that the Nazis were in moral error. But the suggestion that they were attempting to make judgments about universal impartial well-being and getting them wrong is preposterous. Nor is it at all plausible that moral behavior would actually have best expressed what they in fact desired, at least in the case of the worst individuals. So we cannot do so on the naturalist conception of morality. Yet this

[26] See e.g. Marcus Singer "The Ideal of a Rational Morality" *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 60 (1986), p. 18, quoted and discussed in Mark Timmons *Morality Without Foundations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 3.

looks most unsatisfactory. Moral realism was meant to provide a tribunal against which our judgments about how to live could be vindicated or found wanting. Naturalist moral realism seems in grave danger of merely providing a tribunal which tells us when we have changed the subject. Nor would this even vindicate morality as one amongst many equally valid value discourses, all realistically construed, since morality's commitments cannot exist in harmony with such a self-image.[27]

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So naturalism might on the face of it appear to establish something called 'moral realism', but only under a definition which fails to preserve what everyone thought was important about it. Historically philosophers have hoped to establish moral realism because it offers the crucial element of objectivity which expressivism appears to deny us. The skeptical threat from expressivism is of course that if we are forced to conclude that moral properties are not real mind-independent properties, but rather the projection onto the world of personal sentiment, we will no longer be in a position to engage in substantive moral argument or criticize the value judgments of other people with rational authority. We may use non-rational techniques of persuasion, to be sure, but we cannot in good conscience go on thinking that anyone's judgments could at root be any better than anyone else's. Value judgments spring from contingent sentiment, our sentiments differ from theirs, and that is all there is to it. The attraction of moral realism was always seen to lie in its refusal to surrender morality to such contingencies.[28]

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[27] Since I have leveled my argument against the non-reductive position of the Cornell realists, it might be suggested that a reductive naturalism of the kind defended by Railton and Miller could evade my critique of naturalism. Such an objector might try to make an issue of Railton's claim that his program does not rely upon inference to the best explanation. The program begins with moral language and practice, and asks whether we can identify through empirical enquiry any non-moral natural property which might appropriately regulate our use of moral terms. Railton's aim is to provide a reforming definition of the moral in terms of some natural property which can ground a "tolerable revision" of the discourse ("Naturalism and Prescriptivity", op. cit., pp. 157-159). According to Railton, the property which can ground such a revision is that of *being instrumentally rational from a social point of view*. But once again, the strategy by which Railton aims to establish the reality of moral properties can be duplicated to establish the reality of different normative properties such as noble properties. Since Railton begins with a discourse which most of us take to be normative, and asks whether there is any non-moral natural property which we can (with some moderate revision) see that discourse as tracking, why could there not be a normatively antagonistic discourse which its proponents could come to see as tracking some different natural property, hence earning that discourse a realist construal as well?

[28] Of course, prominent contemporary expressivists have argued that despite initial appearances they are at least as capable of accounting for the objectivity of moral judgments as realists; see e.g. Simon Blackburn *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). I am not convinced, and in my remarks about expressivism in what follows I am going to presume the failure of this 'quasi-realist' project. Obviously this is a very pre-

Unfortunately naturalism fails to overcome this central problem, simply regenerating it in a different form. This time there are said to be mind-independent facts which guide our value judgments. But now there are a number of different kinds of value judgments that we could make, each guided by their own set of properties, the reality of which is established by their causal potency. And there are no facts beyond the facts about what we happen to desire that rationally oblige us to make judgments of one kind rather than another. If you have broadly sympathetic sentiments you should make value judgments which attempt to track the 'moral' facts, if you have only contempt for the needs of the masses you should make value judgments which attempt to track the noble facts. So just as expressivism roots value in contingent sentiment and thus makes it ultimately a rationally optional matter what to value, naturalism grounds the normativity of the properties that guide the actions of persons of a particular evaluative outlook in their contingent non-cognitive states, and makes it a rationally optional matter which non-cognitive sentiments to have. Normativity springs from contingent sentiment, our sentiments differ from theirs, that is all there is to it.

Naturalism oddly turns out to have striking affinities with expressivism, then, so much so that from the practical point of view the agent would be in much the same position if either naturalism or expressivism were true. In each case the issue which determines what the agent should do is what her attitudes are and how they can best be expressed in her actions, and not how she can best make her behavior conform to the normative facts, since there are no properties which are normative in themselves on either conception. So there is an important sense in which the price of naturalist realism is the irrelevance of realism, because practically speaking it does not really matter very much whether moral realism so understood is true, to give an unhappy answer to a question once posed by a prominent naturalist.[29] This has to cast doubt on the naturalist's claim that it is a genuinely moral realist position he is advancing, since the purpose of moral discourse is a practical one. We should be careful not to overstate the similarities between the two, of course. The naturalist will want to insist that his position has significant advantages over expressivism, because he does not have to tackle some large difficulties confronting the expressivist, not least in moral semantics. After all, expressivism notoriously faces the Frege-Geach problem, whereas a naturalist realism would vindicate the indicative surface grammar and standard logical inferences of our everyday moral discourse and reasoning. And this would indeed be a major consideration in its favor, were it not offset by the fact that natu-

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sumptuous presumption, but since I cannot even begin to adequately address the issue here I will not try.

29 Nicholas Sturgeon "What Difference Does It Make Whether Moral Realism Is True?" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24, supplement (1986).

ralism's attempt to combine cognitivism with the Humean account of normativity presents it with very serious difficulties of its own, by robbing it of the resources needed to make proper sense of many important features of morality as we ordinarily conceive it.

For example, consider the very strong intuition that one cannot escape one's moral obligations simply by dint of lacking any desire to do what morality says one should do. Naturalists try to account for this by denying that anti-rationalism's rejection of the categoricality of obligation entails that it is hypothetical. Moral obligation is neither categorical nor hypothetical, the naturalist will say; it is 'non-hypothetical'. Moral properties are objective, so they accrue to the actions of agents whatever those agents think about them and whatever they want or do not want to do. It will be a fact that, for example, an unprovoked assault is morally wrong, whether the offender has any desires that could have motivated him to refrain from it if he had reflected properly upon them or not. Hence the moral wrongness of his action is inescapable, the naturalist tells us, just as we always thought.[30] But consider the noble perspective once again. Suppose I am a socialist. I will think amongst other things that society's resources should be utilized in large measure in order to ameliorate the condition of the worst off, and that the pleasures and pursuits of the wealthy should be to some considerable extent sacrificed to this much more important end. From the perspective of the Nietzschean, this is a degenerate thought. Since it pulls its weight in causal explanations, degeneracy is a real mind-independent property. So every time I vote for a left-wing party I behave degenerately, and this is a fact, entirely independent of anything I might think. I am objectively a degenerate, then. But- grant me this for the sake of argument- I am also morally good, so obviously if this is true I do not care one iota, nor granted my psychology is there any prospect of showing that I should. So although in one sense non-hypothetical noble demands are inescapable, in another I escape them entirely, since they do not practically touch me at all. And of course a person lacking the appropriate motivational profile would relate to morality in exactly the same way.

But, as a result, on this conception of the universality of moral obligation it is extremely difficult to make any sense of the idea of a moral *requirement*. In general, it is pretty unclear how something could be a normative requirement upon someone if he would be irrational to comply with it. (Perhaps in the sense that other people might require it from him in order to avoid sanctions of whatever kind. But this then seems to make it a contingent prudential requirement, and not a moral requirement at all.) And the situation is exacerbated by the possibility that all of us may be the subject of any number of conflicting evaluative 'obligations' at any one time. If one is

[30] Railton "Moral Realism", op. cit., p. 203.

under a number of incompatible and equally intrinsically authoritative obligations at the same time, it does not look as though one can be meaningfully said to be thereby required to do anything; rather, one seems to have a choice, and to be facing options rather than requirements. Similarly it is very hard to see how anyone like the Nietzschean could be subject to moral *criticism* on this picture. To be sure, someone can point out that the agent's actions possess the property of moral wrongness, and claim that this makes him a bad person and so on. But this would be moral badness, which *ex hypothesi* the agent has no non-self-interested reason to concern himself with. So the putative moral criticism would amount only to a statement that the agent in question is the kind of person whose projects the moral critic practically opposes, since it is also entirely unclear how a claim that an agent has failed to comply with some rules which we accept she has no reason to comply with could count as a criticism of that person.

It seems to me that the upshot of these kinds of considerations is that naturalism is pushed in the direction of an error theory of morality. When we see how strained, unsatisfying and downright unnatural the naturalist accounts of features like these are, we will no longer be able to see naturalism as vindicating moral discourse as we know it. Naturalist moral obligation is a pale shell of its former self, and we can scarcely make any sense of the idea of a moral rule being a requirement, or something that one could be appropriately criticized for flouting if ultimately one does not want to abide by it. We must accept that the world contains value facts which underwrite value judgments which are utterly abhorrent from the moral perspective. We can only make attenuated sense of the idea of moral error. Inclination casts judgment on morality's suitability for an individual, rather than morality casting judgment on the value of his motives. And so on. Now consider those 'plain persons' whose lives embody or embodied a commitment to the pursuit of morality and justice- abolitionists, civil rights activists, feminists, human rights campaigners and the like. What are the prospects that any of these people would accept such a metaphysics of moral value as a vindication of morality as they understand it? Almost non-existent, I would say; on the contrary, they would all view the suggestion as a perversion of morality which would quite defeat the point of their allegiance to it, which is that the actions it forbids are wrong, and so to be opposed, *simpliciter*. Given then that the purported description of a morality lacking this authority would not be recognized as such by those immersed in moral discourse, the normative authority which naturalism fatally undermines must be a central and not a peripheral commitment of it. Hence the naturalist conception of morality is just too far

away from our ordinary understanding of it to count as a vindication of moral discourse, and consequently as moral realism.[31]

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Before concluding I think it worth stressing briefly the status of these arguments, in order to pre-empt any suggestion of question-begging, since it might be thought that ultimately all they amount to is a demonstration that naturalists are committed to externalist anti-rationalism.[32] For instance one natural way to take my point that on the naturalist account inclination casts judgment on morality rather than morality on inclination is to read it as a complaint that the naturalist will have to admit that there are people whose knavish desires entail that have no reason to act morally. But this clearly would not worry any of the externalists who actually see it as an advantage of their accounts that they can say this.[33] Since externalism is something that naturalists are quite willing to concede, it is indeed the case that any attempt to provide an *a priori* refutation of naturalism by showing it to entail anti-rationalism about moral facts must be a hopeless failure. But it has not been

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31 This line of argument has some parallels with that advanced by Richard Joyce in his recent attempt to establish an error theory of morality. Fundamental to his position is the claim that morality presupposes the existence of categorical reasons for action that apply to moral agents universally. He then goes on to argue that the only normative reasons there can be are internal ones, and that no attempt to square an internalist account of normative reasons with moral rationalism has been or is likely to be successful. On that basis he concludes that morality essentially makes claims that cannot be vindicated. See *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), in which he goes on to outline a fictionalist rather than eliminativist response to the situation as he sees it. The main similarity is that both our respective attacks focus on their targets' inability to account for the normative force that we take to be implicit within the claims of moral discourse. The differences are these. First, I claim that naturalism is undermined by the implications of its own account of the metaphysics of value, making it particularly poorly placed to resist the error theorist. Second, although it has been no part of my purpose to argue this here, I am optimistic about rationalism's prospects and so reject the error theory. I say nothing in defense of rationalism- for some promising arguments see e.g. Russ Shafer-Landau *Moral Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 7-8- because my critique of naturalism is independent of it, and can be advanced in some form by adherents of any of the major theories competing with naturalism. Consider expressivism, for instance. Despite sharing a view of the grounds of normativity with naturalism, expressivism does not collapse into the error theory. Expressivists have no problem with morality's claim to authority, because they hold a moral judgment to be an exhortation to others to view the world and its goings-on with the same attitude as the person making the moral utterance. Such an exhortation is universal, in that it is intended to apply to all moral agents. And clearly an exhortation cannot be mistaken, so even though the expressivist denies that there are any moral facts making some people's judgments correct and others' incorrect, she is not required to hold moral practice to be infected with error. Hence she can happily avail herself of the arguments.

32 In effect this is all that Copp's argument succeeds in establishing, as Miller points out. *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, op. cit., pp. 158-162.

33 E.g. Railton "Moral Realism", op. cit., p. 203; Brink "Moral Motivation", op. cit. See also Alfred Mele "Internalist Moral Cognitivism and Listlessness" *Ethics* 106 (1996).

my intention to advance this argument. Rather, I have been engaging on its own terms the naturalist claim that an *a posteriori* identification of the properties purportedly picked out by moral discourse with causally efficacious natural properties can be defended. What I take myself to have been doing is drawing out the consequences for moral metaphysics of the naturalist account of the reality and normativity of value properties, and showing that metaphysics to be much more alien to us than naturalist anti-rationalism might appear to be on the surface, too alien in the end for us to accept it as an account of what we have been talking about all this time. Mine is therefore an *a posteriori* argument for the conclusion that moral discourse and practice is committed to a much stronger and more exclusive conception of its normativity than naturalism is able to accommodate, not an *a priori* one which effectively assumes this for *reductio*.[34]

So naturalists are entirely at liberty to dispute my claim that the account of morality which they produce fails to preserve the necessary continuity with the linguistic practice of the discourse as we currently use it, and no doubt they will want to do so vigorously. Doing so effectively would require them to show that morality could continue to have the kind of point and import in our lives that it does now, and practically exercise people in the same kind of way it does now, if anti-rationalist views of it came to be generally held. And although I think it can be fairly said that this aspect of the naturalist project has received much less attention in the literature than the issue of the reality of moral properties, some argument along these lines has already been provided. For instance, whilst conceding that naturalism's failure to establish morality as a universal rational requirement counts *prima facie* against it, Railton nevertheless claims that we can continue to "accord morality the scope and dignity is has traditionally enjoyed", since almost everyone has reason to take account of moral considerations, which on his reductionist story are considerations about the instrumental rationality of actions, institutions and the like from an impartial social point of view.[35] This is both because moral action is rational action from an impartial perspective, a perspective that must include the agent's own, and because we are generally very concerned about whether our actions are impartially justifiable. He also provides us with an analogy intended to pre-empt opposition to an anti-rationalist account of obligation. Pointing out that there are epistemic obligations- to follow the requirements of logical consistency in belief formation, for instance- he notes that as a matter of fact the chance of any of us having a belief set that entirely conforms to these obligations is miniscule. But no-one thinks that this fact itself gives us any reason to set about the immensely

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34 On the legitimacy of this anti-naturalist strategy, see Railton "Reply to David Wiggins", op. cit., p. 316.

35 "Moral Realism", op. cit., pp. 200-204, quotation at 203.

difficult task of complying with them, most obviously by ridding ourselves of all the trivial inconsistencies in our beliefs. In a memorable image Railton likens any attempt to do so to someone leaving his New Jersey home to hunt alligators in southeast Georgia, just in case he were to find himself alone and unarmed in their territory at some unspecified time in the future. Hence the idea of there being an obligation upon an agent with which she has no reason to comply is perhaps not so odd after all. In any case, the normativity of morality for agents by and large is the best we are going to get, he concludes, since practical reason cannot be more than hypothetical, and some people strongly desire morally abhorrent things.

Railton hopes to persuade us using arguments like these that naturalism's externalist account of morality's normativity is something we can live with, even if it does not give us all we might have hoped for. And it remains to be seen how powerful they are when fully developed. I remain skeptical however. It seems to me that these kinds of arguments are not sufficient to do away with the problem, because much of their persuasive force trades on a tacit assumption that is shown by my earlier thought-experiment to be illegitimate. This is that, aside from simple self-interest, normatively speaking morality is the only game in town. Making this assumption would leave us endorsing something like the dualism of practical reason held by Henry Sidgwick. On his view both their own good, understood as personal happiness, and the good of others more generally are rational ends for agents. We adopt the Egoist viewpoint when we consider our actions with respect to securing our own good, the Universal Hedonist viewpoint when we are considering how to advance that of others. Although these viewpoints largely coincide for most people at least most of the time, they are not ultimately fully commensurable, and when they conflict neither viewpoint is rationally authoritative over the other. Consequently agents cannot be rationally faulted for subordinating the moral viewpoint to the egoistic one.[36] Since we all accept that we have prudential reasons which can come into conflict with moral obligation, and that such reasons can be very pressing, such a dualism can seem quite compelling. The picture would be this: agents have a choice between thinking selfishly, or thinking in a way that is sensitive to considerations of value beyond mere self-interest, which is thinking morally. Although no purely rational consideration obliges any particular agent to concern herself with the value of her actions from a less partial perspective than her own, almost everyone has at least some motive to do so, and the practical thinking of any agent so motivated is governed by facts about the way things are, morally speaking. On this picture it can still look as though morality is a set of robustly real value facts guiding the actions of those who care about more than self-interest, even though it is admitted that there are

[36] Sidgwick *The Methods of Ethics* 7th ed., (London: Papermac, 1907), esp. pp. 496-509.

some agents with no reason to do so, and it can thereby appear that sufficient continuity with the linguistic practice of moral discourse is preserved to allow the naturalist to claim a vindication of it in broad outline.

But, as we saw, the naturalist's own criteria for the reality of normative properties generate a much richer metaphysics of value than this. We would not merely have a dualist contrast between morality and self-interest, but a potential plethora of value systems tracking equally real yet normatively antagonistic properties, any of which may be in as much tension with simple self-interest as morality. (Consider the samurai whose honor requires his suicide.) The claim that some agents cannot be rationally faulted in refusing to assess their actions from a less nakedly partial perspective is one thing. It is quite another to affirm that there are more than one and potentially any number of evaluative perspectives from which one could view the world, that these perspectives are practically incompatible, and that nothing beyond what one happens to want and feel constrains the evaluative perspective from which it is appropriate for any particular agent to view it. This is the picture to which naturalists turn out to be committed, and it is one of a world which it is very hard to see as containing any value facts at all, let alone facts about moral value, whatever descriptive properties we may need to postulate to explain sociological phenomena.[37]

Railton rightly cautions us against rushing to an error theory of a discourse on the grounds that not every element of it is defensible. "It seems rash to speak of eliminativism when the revisionist story preserves much of the connection between moral evaluation and specific, central human concerns and practices", he writes.[38] But the distortions of our ordinary thinking about morality that a naturalist metaphysics of morals forces upon us are much more problematic than naturalists have been prepared to admit. Since the commitments it violates are central, its attempt to revise them must amount to elimination, whatever else would be preserved. So I remain confident that if one were to insist upon both a cognitivist view of moral judgment, and the account of normativity borrowed by the naturalists from Hume, the right thing to do would simply be to accept that morality's claims are indefensible.

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37 The alleged analogy between moral and logical 'oughts' fails for similar reasons. What we see in that case is a local deviation from a general attunement. No agent that we can imagine could fail to be generally receptive to logical consistency and the like, since a sentient being who failed to be so would never accomplish any of her goals. The rational agent has a standing reason to be logical, which can be outweighed by other reasons she has in particular cases, comprehensively so in cases such as this. By contrast, the nobles of the example have no reason to concern themselves about morality at all, and every reason to concern themselves with a normatively antagonistic value. The analogy would only be appropriate then if there were a number of different versions of logic which agents could use to guide their actions and structure their belief systems, with the logic that is right for particular individuals varying with their desires. But of course there are not, nor would we stand under logical obligation in a world in which there were.

38 "Reply to David Wiggins", op. cit., p. 323.

Obviously then to avoid the error theory one of these must be given up. Expressivists of course deny the cognitivity of moral judgments. But expressivism holds no attractions for anyone wanting to hang onto moral objectivity, so anyone who does must reject the account of normativity. Thus Copp's paper is partially vindicated, because naturalists are supposed to be such people, and although they were not in fact attempting to establish a justification of moral standards with their argument for the reality of moral properties, as it turns out they should have been looking for an argument which did both. This is because unless what we are trying to establish when we try to establish moral realism is the reality of intrinsically normative properties, rather than properties which are contingently normative for persons who happen to have particular motivational profiles, we are not going to establish the authority that morality requires, or escape the arbitrariness that moral realism was supposed to banish. So although naturalists and expressivists will consider their positions to be miles apart, and in dispute with one another will cite the Frege-Geach problem, practicality, psychological realism and so on, from the traditional realist point of view what they have in common is more significant than what separates them. Neither metaphysics of value is suitable for grounding any robustly objective conception of morality. Hence from this hostile perspective such debates look like a philosophical sideshow, a squabble about the layout of the deckchairs whilst the good ship *Objectivity* goes down.[39]

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