

CAN MOOREAN REALISM SHOULDER ITS EXPLANATORY BURDEN?

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G. E. Moore (1903) famously held that moral properties are “autonomous,” that they are distinct from properties of any non-moral, “natural” kind. Modern non-naturalists differ from Moore, and from one another, in a variety of ways. But centrally, nearly all maintain some version of this “autonomy” thesis, often with respect to normativity more generally, rather than just morality.¹ For the purposes of this discussion, I understand the thesis as follows:

AUTONOMY. Normative properties are neither identical with, constitutive of, nor constituted by non-normative properties.²

¹ Some of the arguments from other theorists that I discuss in this paper are made in terms of morality in particular, rather than normativity more generally. In order to avoid various caveats, parentheticals and orthogonal discussions, I will nevertheless uniformly speak of normative facts, properties, etc. Given that (a) the arguments I discuss can arguably all be extended to the normative more generally and (b) most modern non-naturalists are non-naturalists about normativity in general, I am confident that this slight fudge will serve only to simplify, rather than mislead.

² This formulation of the thesis is adapted primarily from Enoch (2011). In addressing the nature of constitution, Enoch appeals to a “nothing-over-and-above” relation: “I take the more philosophically-sounding relations of identity, reduction, constitution, and grounding to be attempts at precisifying this more intuitive relation . . . I take it to be a starting point for the debate over the relation between statues and ‘their’ lumps of clay that there is *a* sense in which the statue is nothing over and above the lump of clay” (Enoch 2011, 101–102). The apparent suggestion here is that to say that the normative is neither identical with, constitutive of, nor constituted by anything non-normative is to say that the normative is not related to anything non-normative in the way that statues are related to “their” lumps of clay (nor in the way that the clay is related to the statue). Ultimately, I don’t think that the “nothing-over-and-above” relation is much more helpful than the constitution one. After all, Enoch suggests that this relation is intuitive, but it then appears (given his inclusion of “*a* sense”) that even this relation needs to be disambiguated before it can do the work we need it to do. Nevertheless, I think the clay/statue analogy is fairly apt, and that the relevant relation—whatever it is best called—is intuitive enough that a more thorough theoretical discussion can be left off for another time.

Most self-proclaimed non-naturalists (along with others, perhaps³) would assent to AUTONOMY. To avoid certain problems with the label “non-naturalist,” including the fact that some self-proclaimed non-naturalists might not accept AUTONOMY in this form, I will call those that do “Moorean realists.”⁴

Standard complaints about Moorean realism centrally include its inability to plausibly explain our epistemic access to the “queer” normative facts the view posits,⁵ how our normative terms succeed in referring to normative properties,⁶ and the metaphysical relationship between the normative and the non-normative (e.g., why the former supervenes on the latter).⁷ In this paper, I set out to assess the Moorean’s ability to shoulder these burdens. I discuss each of these challenges in turn, along with the Moorean’s ability to explain the relevant phenomena. The good news for the

³ Technically, there is no reason one couldn’t accept AUTONOMY but maintain that normative properties are in some sense “natural.” Historically, however, I know of no one who maintains such a view.

⁴ Well, the overwhelming majority of them, anyway. In the next section, I narrow the field slightly by introducing two further theses of Moorean realism, as I understand it. The list of Moorean realists—i.e., of theorists who, arguably, would endorse AUTONOMY and the other theses to be presented—includes Cuneo (2007), Dworkin (1996) and (2011), Enoch (2011), Fitzpatrick (2008), Huemer (2006), Kramer (2009), Nagel (1986) and (1997), Parfit (2011), and Scanlon (2009). There are at least three notable absences here. The first is Oddie (2009), who I set aside because he holds the minority view that the non-natural normative properties are causally efficacious. I discuss this issue further below. Second is Shafer-Landau (2005). Though he considers himself a non-naturalist, his claim that natural facts “exhaustively compose moral ones” is apparently at odds with AUTONOMY (Shafer-Landau 2005, 75). Finally, there is Wedgwood (2007). On the one hand, he is clear that the normative can be understood in terms of the mental (and not in terms of anything else), which seems clearly to violate AUTONOMY. On the other hand, he believes that the mental cannot be understood without an appeal to the normative—and so there is a sense in which we might attribute to him a kind of “wide Moorean” view, holding that the normative/mental realm is autonomous (though, like Oddie, Wedgwood also holds that the normative is causally efficacious). I discuss Wedgwood further in §3, where I address normative semantics.

⁵ For the original “queerness” challenge, see Mackie (1977).

⁶ See, e.g., Wedgwood (2007).

⁷ See, e.g., Blackburn (1973) and (1988).

Moorean, I conclude, is that insofar as he can meet or deflect the metaphysical challenge, the epistemic and semantic challenges pose no additional threat (at least in principle). This is important, as it means Mooreans can focus their energies on the metaphysical issues, rather than worrying that they have special problems with knowledge or reference. The bad news, however, is that the story the Moorean has to tell in response to the metaphysical challenge is highly controversial, and may ultimately represent a bullet that is simply too large to bite.

1. Epistemology

1.1 The Challenge

Epistemological challenges to Moorean realism take many forms. As of late, the major focus has been Sharon Street's (2006) "evolutionary argument." In short, Street contends that we should reject Moorean realism⁸ because our normative beliefs are explained by selective (evolutionary) pressures.

Street's argument is an instance of what Russ Shafer-Landau (2012) calls "genealogical arguments" against realism. The true force of such arguments comes not from their claims about what the explanation of normative beliefs *is*, but rather what it is *not*. If normative beliefs are not explained by realistically-construed normative facts, then any robust connection between our beliefs and those facts might seem miraculous.⁹ For Street, the mere fact that selective pressures explain our normative beliefs is not an objection to realism; the worry is that the evolutionary explanation seems to rule out an explanation in terms of normative facts.

Shafer-Landau (2012) identifies several forms of response (beyond rejecting the evolutionary story itself or undermining particular versions of the challenge) the realist might give to such

⁸ Street attacks a broader class than Moorean realism, but it is one of her targets.

⁹ Of course, our beliefs could instead explain the facts; but that wouldn't be a very "realist" thing to say—more on this later.

challenges. The first relies on normative reduction and can therefore be set aside here, as such reduction is incompatible with Moorean realism.¹⁰ The second solution is to appeal to the a priori nature of normative truth. I set this aside as well, not because it is not a potentially viable response, but because it can, I believe, be subsumed under the last form of response, which Shafer-Landau dubs the “indirect tracking hypothesis.” (I return to the point about the a priori further on.)

Taking this “indirect tracking” line (specifically against Street), a number of realists grant that evolutionary forces have shaped our normative beliefs, but postulate a normative fact which, if true, would explain why evolutionary forces nevertheless would lead our normative beliefs to track normative truth. For example, David Enoch (2011) proposes that the *goodness of survival* ensures that our normative beliefs, shaped in part through the evolutionary “aim” of survival, will track the good. Similarly, Knut Skarsaune (2011) argues that if pleasure is good and pain bad, those who believe as much are more likely to avoid pain and seek pleasure, and those who do so are more likely to pass on their genes. And Erik Weilenberg (2010) suggests that we might have moral rights grounded in the very cognitive faculties that have been selected for in human beings.

How successful these indirect tracking hypotheses will be depends, in part, on the plausibility of the particular normative facts and evolutionary stories told by their authors. That will not be my concern here. Rather, my concern is with the prospects for indirect tracking views in principle. In what follows, I focus on Enoch’s version of the response, partly because Enoch begins by helpfully clarifying the epistemological challenge itself. With his work in hand, we will be in a position to see not only how successful indirect tracking hypotheses are likely to be, but also why such hypotheses are the only real option for the Moorean.

¹⁰ For discussion of Street’s argument from the perspective of reductive realism, see Copp (2008).

1.2 The Challenge, Clarified

Recognizing the diversity in expressions of the epistemological challenge, Enoch (2011, chap. 7) offers a helpful formulation of the challenge, intending to make it as strong as possible before addressing it on behalf of the Moorean.¹¹ Whenever we take ourselves to experience some degree of epistemic success in a domain (i.e., take it that our beliefs in that domain are, to a significant extent, true, or justified, or reliably formed, or knowledge), Enoch argues, we are committed to a *correlation* between our beliefs and the facts in that domain. For instance, if we take ourselves generally to know or have justified beliefs about the weather, it seems we commit to a correlation between our weather-beliefs and the weather-facts. Especially for Mooreans, given their commitment to the distinctive nature of the normative, the analogous correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts is, as Enoch puts it, “striking”; “absent some . . . explanation, the correlation would be just too miraculous to believe” (Enoch 2011, 158).¹² If the correlation could only be brute or unexplainable, this would be a powerful reason to believe that there was no such correlation after all, and thus no epistemic success. We can therefore understand the epistemological challenge as a challenge to explain the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts—a correlation the Moorean is committed to if he is to avoid skepticism.

It should be fairly clear how this formulation of the challenge both captures and strengthens Street’s, at least for our purposes. By offering non-normative explanations of our normative beliefs, genealogical challenges like Street’s seek to reveal as implausible any claim to reliability with respect to the normative. Enoch more directly challenges the realist to explain the relevant reliability—in the form of a correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts. This is a greater challenge, it

¹¹ Enoch’s formulation of the epistemological challenge was originally presented in his (2010).

¹² *Any* correlation between beliefs and facts seems “striking” in the absence of explanation but, as evidenced by the need for discussion on this very topic, the explanation is significantly less transparent in the normative case (in contrast with others, such as our beliefs about the current weather).

seems, than the one of showing that such a correlation *could* exist, despite an evolutionary explanation.

How is the Moorean to explain the correlation in question? He would be wise to begin by considering how correlations are explained in general. Enoch offers:

[I]f the correlated factors are A and B, then (roughly speaking) either A-facts are somehow (causally, constitutively, or both) responsible for the B-facts, or the B-facts are responsible for the A-facts. . . . [Alternatively,] it is possible that the explanation . . . is in terms of a third factor, C, that is (roughly speaking) responsible both for A-facts and for B-facts. (Enoch 2011, 167)

I take it that by “responsible for” Enoch means something like “(part of) the ultimate explanation for.” Throughout, I use “responsible for” in this way. Further, I assume, as Enoch does, that the relevant forms of explanation are either causal or constitutive.¹³ Given this, it seems that the possible responses to the challenge are: (a) normative beliefs are responsible for (i.e., are (part of) the ultimate causal or constitutive explanation for) normative facts; (b) normative facts are responsible for normative beliefs; or (c) some third factor is responsible for both.

¹³ An anonymous reviewer suggested that this seems to ignore the possibility of appealing to the “metaphysical grounding” that has been gaining traction in the metaphysics literature. While I cannot pursue this far here, it seems clear that grounding doesn’t present the Moorean with any new tools for meeting the challenges on hand. Indeed, Enoch himself says that he takes talk of grounding to be an attempt to capture what he means by constitution (see note 2, above). This may not be entirely correct, since grounding is sometimes taken to capture a broader class of relations. For instance, Hofweber (2009) seems to think that one sense of grounding concerns conceptual priority. Grounding of this kind, however, won’t be of any use to Mooreans. Thus, ultimately, I think that Enoch is correct that, insofar as grounding concerns the kinds of metaphysical relations that, in theory, could help meet the challenges on hand, it is ruled out by AUTONOMY. For useful introductions to grounding, see Rosen (2010) and Trogdon (2013).

The Moorean's options are further limited. The first option, (a), is ruled out not only for the Moorean, but for most (if not all, depending on your favored taxonomy) realists, because it violates the commonly-held thesis of mind/response/attitude/stance-independence:

INDEPENDENCE. Normative facts are not made true by their "ratification" from within any actual or hypothetical perspective.¹⁴

All Mooreans endorse INDEPENDENCE. First, it is almost certainly entailed by AUTONOMY.¹⁵ Second, non-naturalists tend to be placed into the broader "objectivist" camp that is, arguably, defined partly by its acceptance of INDEPENDENCE, or something quite like it. In any case, INDEPENDENCE is a thesis of Moorean realism as understood here.¹⁶

Returning to option (a): If my belief that eating meat is wrong were responsible for the wrongness of eating meat, then clearly eating meat's wrongness would be made true by its "ratification" from within my perspective. This would violate INDEPENDENCE. Thus, as Enoch himself concludes, Mooreans cannot offer solutions of form (a).¹⁷

¹⁴ Different versions of this thesis have been called different things, but seem to be capturing roughly the same idea. This formulation is borrowed from Shafer-Landau's (2005, 15–16) characterization of "stance-independence."

¹⁵ The only way this could not be the case would be if some aspect of our perspective were normative. Given increasing acceptance of the view that belief has a normative component, I will not say that this is impossible. But I am confident that this view will not have any substantive effect on the strategies open to the Moorean. In any case, it is hard to imagine that any non-naturalist would deny INDEPENDENCE, either because they embrace a normatively-loaded conception of belief or for any other reason.

¹⁶ As indicated in the previous note, it's unclear that we really need to talk about INDEPENDENCE as an independent thesis. I do so largely because I am following Enoch's lead, who relies on "response-independence" (rather than the broader thesis of AUTONOMY) in rejecting certain kinds of explanation of the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts.

¹⁷ INDEPENDENCE also rules out some instances of (c). According to projectivists, normative facts are ultimately explained by certain non-cognitive pro- and con-attitudes. For them, a third factor—the aforementioned non-cognitive attitudes—might explain the correlation between normative beliefs and

Turn now to option (b), on which the order of explanation is reversed—the ultimate explanation of our normative beliefs is the normative facts. AUTONOMY straightforwardly rules out a constitutive explanation, since it holds that there can be no constitutive relationship between the normative and the non-normative. So if the normative facts explain our normative beliefs, they must do so causally. Unfortunately, it is now widely accepted that the autonomous, non-natural normative properties the Moorean believes in would have to be causally inefficacious. Indeed, self-proclaimed non-naturalists themselves nearly all accept:

INEFFICACY. The basic normative facts are causally inefficacious.¹⁸

This is the only thesis discussed so far that is likely to be at all contentious among non-naturalists.¹⁹

While many believe that non-naturalism is committed to INEFFICACY, I cannot fully address this

normative facts because those attitudes are responsible for both the beliefs and the facts. Yet if the ultimate explanation for eating meat's wrongness were my con-attitude towards eating meat, this would violate INDEPENDENCE just as surely as if the explanation were my belief. So Mooreans cannot employ this strategy, either.

Of course, certain forms of non-cognitivism also endorse the claim that normative facts are ultimately explained by certain non-cognitive pro- and con-attitudes. Such views are not subject to Enoch's challenge, since it is explicitly about normative *beliefs*. However, some non-cognitivists—notably, quasi-realists—arguably face an analogous challenge. See Street (2011).

It should also be noted that while throughout I refer to normative “facts,” I do so only for the sake of consistency (as this is the phrase Enoch uses). On a view like projectivism or quasi-realism, it might turn out (depending further still on their metaphysical views) that there are normative “truths” but no normative “facts.” This distinction is irrelevant to my arguments.

¹⁸ Enoch explicitly endorses this claim. He does not, however, say what he means by “basic.” I take it the idea is something like this: Utilitarians believe that the fact (if it is a fact) that utility should be maximized is a (the only) basic normative fact. Another normative fact might be that I ought to perform a particular action right now (because that act would maximize utility). But this is not a *basic* normative fact because it depends, in part, on contingent, non-normative facts about my circumstances and the consequences of my actions. From here, when speaking of normative facts, I mean always to be referring to the “basic” ones thus understood.

issue here.²⁰ So let us simply presume that the prevailing opinion is correct. From here out, “Moorean realism” is to be understood as referring to any view committed to AUTONOMY, INDEPENDENCE and INEFFICACY.

It follows from the above that the Moorean cannot embrace option (b), as tenets of his view—INEFFICACY and AUTONOMY—respectively rule out ultimate causal or constitutive explanations of the normative in terms of the non-normative. Thus, for our purposes at least, it would seem the Moorean is left with only one form of explanation for the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts: He must maintain (c) that some third factor (that is not a pro- or con-attitude²¹) is responsible for both normative beliefs and normative facts. Indeed, this is precisely the sort of solution Enoch claims to offer. Let us consider his proposal.

1.3 Enoch’s Proposed Solution

Ironically, Enoch’s solution begins with the premise that our normative beliefs are (largely) explained by selective (evolutionary) pressures—precisely the premise that Street takes to *undermine* realism. Street’s mistake, claims Enoch, is limiting herself to explanations of form (a) and (b). Once we recognize the possibility of (c), evolved normative truth-tracking²² becomes significantly less mysterious. This is because once one acknowledges the possibility of a third-factor explanation, it becomes apparent that truth-tracking might be guaranteed through a sort of “pre-established

¹⁹ For an attempt to reconcile non-naturalism with causal efficacy, see, e.g., Oddie (2009). This is a rare view, however. Most non-naturalists, including those mentioned in note 4, above (except for Wedgwood and Oddie himself), seem to accept INEFFICACY.

²⁰ For interesting arguments against normative (moral) causation, see Slutsky (2001) and Zangwill (2006).

²¹ See note 17, above.

²² Or, at least, “a close relative of truth-tracking,” if one takes tracking to entail a causal connection. See Enoch (2011), 166 n. 36.

harmony” between normative beliefs and normative facts (Enoch 2011, 168). And this would be the case, Enoch argues, given the minimal and plausible assumption that *survival is (at least sometimes) good*.

Let us consider how this is meant to work in a bit more detail: Suppose that survival is good. Evolution typically selects for features that promote survival. Thus things explained by selective pressures by-and-large promote survival. Since survival is good (we are supposing), it follows that those things explained by selective pressures will (happen to) by-and-large promote the good. So our normative beliefs, if explained by selective pressures, by-and-large promote the good. Finally, if we assume that we best promote the good when our normative beliefs are *true*,²³ then it will turn out that selective pressures have given us many true normative beliefs—enough, presumably, to establish the correlation in question.

If we grant all this (and that’s a big “if”), it seems that Enoch has met his own challenge. He has offered a third-factor explanation of the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts. That third factor is the goodness of survival.

But there is a potential problem here. According to Enoch, the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts might be explained in one of three ways, two of which are ruled out by his metanormative commitments. The remaining possibility is (c) that some third factor is responsible for both normative beliefs and normative facts, and thus explains the correlation

²³ This is plausible but not uncontroversial. Some utilitarians, for example, believe that while the only basic normative fact is that utility is the good, it may be better that people believe some “folk” normative view that leads them to promote utility than for them to believe utilitarianism itself, which would lead them only to waste time making difficult and costly utility calculus. See, e.g., Sidgwick (1874), 487-489. Enoch suggests, however, that there are additional reasons to find his view plausible, stemming from something like Gibbard’s (1990, chap. 4) “normative governance” mechanism. The idea, roughly, is that we are the sorts of creatures that act, much of the time, in accordance with how we believe we should act. So it makes sense that in order to “push” us to Φ , selective pressures would lead us to believe that we *ought* to Φ . This is also discussed at some length in Copp (2008), drawing on Kitcher (2005).

between them. Enoch proposes such a third factor: the goodness of survival. But notice that this “third factor” is no such thing, for it is itself a normative fact. Enoch’s solution, purportedly of form (c), seems to collapse into a solution of form (b). Rather than suggesting that the normative facts are generally responsible for normative beliefs, Enoch has instead suggested that a single normative fact—the goodness of survival—is responsible both for normative beliefs and (the rest of the) normative facts. Since Mooreans are committed to the view that normative facts cannot be responsible for normative beliefs, Enoch’s solution apparently falls prey to his own arguments.

Importantly, this seems to be a problem not just for Enoch’s particular solution, but for *any* solution of form (c)—that is, for any indirect tracking hypothesis. Recall that according to Enoch, there are three forms of response to the epistemological challenge: (a) normative beliefs are responsible for normative facts; (b) normative facts are responsible for normative beliefs; or (c) some third factor is responsible for both. Because of INDEPENDENCE, the Moorean cannot offer a solution of form (a). Because of AUTONOMY and INEFFICACY, the Moorean cannot offer a solution of form (b).

Now, any third factor would have to be either normative or non-normative. As we saw in the case of Enoch’s own solution, the third factor cannot be normative, because the normative can neither cause (because of INEFFICACY) nor constitute (because of AUTONOMY)—and thus cannot be the ultimate explanation for—anything non-normative.

The alternative is to look for a non-normative third factor. AUTONOMY rules out the possibility that anything non-normative constitutes anything normative. So the Moorean would have to appeal to a causal explanation. But this is a non-starter. Aside from its being manifestly bizarre to speak of *causing* happiness to be good or *causing* treating agents as mere means to be wrong, the fact that the basic normative facts are necessary (most agree) seems to preclude their being causally

explained at all. After all, causes are events *within* a world and thus cannot explain truths that hold *across* possible worlds.²⁴ So this option seems closed as well.

It is imperative that we keep in mind here that we are talking about *ultimate* explanations. Like most everyone, Mooreans maintain that the normative supervenes on the non-normative, and thus hold that it is often the case that something's non-normative properties are the *immediate* explanation for its normative properties.²⁵ But for the Moorean, at least, such cases must be representative of some *further* basic normative fact that is part of the *ultimate* explanation in these cases. For example, if Bob is bad because Bob is a liar, it seems Bob's being a liar explains (in the immediate sense) his being bad. But this is true, for the Moorean, only because (say) it is an independent normative fact that being a liar makes one bad. *Ultimately*, Bob's badness depends not just on his being a liar, but also on that normative fact.

There is thus a general problem for the Moorean: On his view, the normative cannot be the ultimate explanation for the non-normative, nor can the non-normative be the ultimate explanation for the normative. It follows that the Moorean cannot offer solutions to the epistemological challenge of *any* of the three forms Enoch has proposed. So if Enoch is right that the challenge can only be met with a solution of form (a), (b) or (c), then the Moorean cannot meet the challenge at all.

²⁴ My thanks to Christian Coons for this way of putting the point. The obvious exception to all this, of course, is Divine Command Theory, according to which God creates (causes?) the normative truth. I am confident that such theories are subject to sufficient objections along other lines (e.g., the Euthyphro dilemma) to be set aside here. In any case, such views are typically referred to as *super*-naturalist rather than non-naturalist, and are not particularly friendly to Moorean intuitions.

²⁵ I could, of course, introduce a SUPERVENIENCE thesis as a fourth commitment of Moorean realism. But I take it that a commitment to supervenience of some kind is universal enough that this can remain implicit.

Luckily for the Moorean, Enoch is wrong to think that he is thus limited. For not only is there a fourth form of solution available, but, as I now argue, Enoch's proposal *is* of this fourth kind—he misidentifies the form of his own solution.

1.4 The Form of Enoch's Solution

The worry that Enoch's solution collapses into a solution of form (b) seems natural given a strict reading of Enoch's discussion of the forms a solution might take. After all, if normative beliefs and normative facts are not responsible for one another, then, Enoch has claimed, some third factor must be responsible for both—the solution must be of form (c). But Enoch's solution is not, strictly speaking, of this form at all. To see what form his solution *does* take, consider Enoch's example of how third-factor explanations function in other contexts:

What explains the correlation (if indeed there is one) between giving rise to strongly affectionate feelings and having a poor sense of time? Here's one possible answer: Young children are cute. Being a young child explains—indeed, perhaps causes—having a poor sense of time. And of course, being cute is closely though perhaps not causally related to giving rise to strongly affectionate feelings. The fact that young children are cute, then, pre-establishes the harmony between giving rise to strongly affectionate feelings and having a poor sense of time. (Enoch 2011, 169)

The factors correlated are (A) giving rise to strongly affectionate feelings and (B) having a poor sense of time. What explains this correlation, according to Enoch, is (C) the fact that young children are cute. What is key here is that we notice that the fact that young children are cute is itself responsible *for neither A nor B*.

If C is not responsible for A or B, how can it explain their *correlation*? The answer is not hard to find: Cute things tend to garner affection. Young children tend to have poor senses of time. And

in cases exemplifying the correlation between A and B, certain things' being cute explains their garnering affection and those same things' being young children explains their having a poor sense of time. So there is a correlation between A and B not because something is responsible for both, but because what (in some cases) explains some particular thing's instantiating A is correlated with what (in some of those same cases) explains that same thing's instantiating B. This further correlation—between being cute and being a young child—has simply been expressed, by Enoch, as the single claim (C) that children are cute.²⁶

Here is what we have discovered: The most obvious way for a correlation to be explained is through one correlate's being responsible for the other. A less obvious way, as Enoch tells us, is for some third factor to be responsible for each correlate. But yet *another* possibility is that the target correlation (i.e., the one we are attempting to explain) between A and B is explained by *another* correlation whose correlates are respectively responsible for A and B.²⁷ It is an explanation of this last kind—what I will refer to as form (d)—that is at work in Enoch's example above: The correlation between being cute and being a young child explains the correlation between giving rise to strongly affectionate feelings and having a poor sense of time.

Return now to Enoch's solution: Enoch proposes that survival's goodness is the third-factor explanation of the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts. Since survival's

²⁶ It is clear that this expresses a *mere* correlation (as opposed to a necessary connection between properties) given that (I trust we'd all agree) not all children are cute.

²⁷ The actual possibility is broader than this. It could turn out that, in some cases, the target correlates are not ultimately explained by the third-factor correlates but by something "further up the chain." This might happen, first, if the target correlates are ultimately explained by the correlates of some n^{th} -level correlation that in turn explains the $n-1^{\text{th}}$ level correlation, which then explains the $n-2^{\text{th}}$ level correlation, and so on. Alternatively, but similarly, it might be that the target correlates are ultimately explained by *one* of the correlates of some n^{th} -level correlation in which that correlate explains its correlative, which in turn explains the $n-1^{\text{th}}$ level correlation and so on. I do not explore these possibilities further here, as they should have no substantive effect on my arguments.

goodness is a normative fact (if it's a fact at all), if it were responsible for both normative beliefs and normative facts this would indeed collapse into a solution of form (b). But this is not the case. After all, survival's *goodness* is not responsible for our normative beliefs; rather survival itself (or, more properly, selective pressures that "aim" at survival) is.²⁸

The situation here is similar to the non-normative case above: Enoch appeals in his solution to the goodness of survival. "Survival is good" expresses a correlation between survival and goodness—presumably, something like "things that promote survival tend to also be good."²⁹ This third-factor correlation explains the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts because its correlates are responsible, respectively, for normative beliefs and normative facts. On this model, the fact that they promote survival is responsible for our normative beliefs being as they

²⁸ Similarly, it is not *survival's* goodness that is responsible for the (rest of the) normative facts; rather, it may be that the remaining normative facts follow in some way from the nature of goodness itself. Enoch offers: "Perhaps the evolutionary 'aim'—whatever exactly it is—causally shapes our normative beliefs, but the fact that the evolutionary 'aim' is of value does not causally shape the normative truths. It seems more appropriate to say that it is related to them in some constitutive way, a way the details of which depend on the details of your favorite first-order, normative theory" (Enoch 2011, 169). It is worth noting, in fairness to Enoch, that given what he says here, as well as the fact that he consistently qualifies his remarks by talking of third factors' being responsible for correlates only "roughly speaking," it is plausible that he implicitly recognizes form (d). Nevertheless, it is important that we explicitly distinguish this possibility from form (c) so as to better understand how each form functions and, ultimately, better understand how Enoch's purported solution is meant to work.

²⁹ In the non-normative case above it was fairly clear what was correlated: the two properties of 'garnering affection' and 'having a poor sense of time'. Here, it is less clear. Is it the case that, as just suggested, the correlation is between the properties of 'promoting survival' and 'being good'? I'm genuinely uncertain. But it certainly seems as though *some* correlation is being expressed. The only alternative (on the plausible assumption that relations between distinct properties are always correlations) is that "survival is good" expresses a property identity or constitutive relationship of some kind. But this is clearly not the case, especially given that, as Enoch himself explicitly tell us, survival is only *sometimes* good. And, of course, for a Moorean like Enoch, the relevant properties have to be distinct anyway.

are. And the nature of goodness is responsible (in some presumably constitutive sense, Enoch suggests³⁰) for the other normative facts.

Summing up: Because Enoch claims that correlations are explained in one of three ways, and seemingly “shoehorns” his solution into one of the three, his solution might appear to collapse unacceptably into a form he rejects. But the problem is not that his solution thus collapses, but rather that it is of a *fourth* form Enoch does not discuss. And thankfully so, given that without a fourth option, the Moorean position would apparently be indefensible.

Given the above, it thus seems that Mooreans can meet the epistemological challenge by—and *only* by—appealing to a third-factor relation between the normative and the non-normative. Indeed, this is precisely what Enoch, Skarsaune and Weilenberg do. The trouble, as we shall see, is that in order for this third-factor to be the *ultimate* explanation for the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts, that third-factor relation must be *brute*. After all, if it were explainable, whatever explained it would be the ultimate explanation for the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts. And we’ve just concluded that there can be no such thing—i.e., that no normative or non-normative fact can explain the epistemic correlation. The Moorean’s explanatory story has to bottom out at a relation between the normative and the non-normative.

Before looking at these metaphysical issues more directly, however, let us pause to consider one of the Moorean’s *semantic* problems.

2. Semantics

Just as Mooreans owe us a story about how our normative beliefs came to reliably track actual goodness, they likewise owe us a story about how our term “good” came to *refer* to actual goodness, and likewise for other normative terms. In the epistemic case, the Moorean is challenged to explain

³⁰ See note 28, above.

the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts. Here, the Moorean is challenged to explain “a correlation between something else down here in our world (our relevant referential practices) and some other things in Plato’s heaven (normative properties and relations)” (Enoch 2011, 183)

Because of this parallel, much of what was said in §1 turns out to be relevant here. There, I argued that there cannot be normative (ultimate) explanations of the non-normative, nor non-normative (ultimate) explanations of the normative. Because of this, most possible explanations for the relation between referential practices and normative properties are ruled out.³¹ For example, because of INEFFICACY and AUTONOMY, normative properties cannot themselves explain our referential practices. Likewise, because of INDEPENDENCE and AUTONOMY, our referential practices cannot explain the normative properties.³² And because one correlate is normative and the other non-normative, no third factor (which would presumably be either normative or non-normative itself) can explain both.

It should be clear that, ultimately, the Moorean’s position with respect to the semantic challenge will be precisely like his position with respect to the epistemological challenge. Assuming

³¹ This depends on the assumption that the “relevant referential practices” are themselves non-normative. This is certainly true, at least for Mooreans, who hold that the normative and the mental are metaphysically distinct. However, it is worth noting that Ralph Wedgwood’s (2007) view attempts to capture much of what is appealing about Moorean realism while accepting that “the intentional is normative,” and thus, strictly speaking, rejecting AUTONOMY, though one might take him to be committed to a sort of “wide autonomy” for a class of properties that includes both the normative and (some of) the mental. Enoch himself draws heavily on Wedgwood in his discussion of semantics, though Enoch admits that he cannot take Wedgwood’s view wholly on board precisely because of this issue.

³² Though I will leave exploration of this point for another time, it is interesting to consider what effects these limitations have on the kinds of metasemantic theories (in particular, theories of reference) available to Mooreans. For example, it seems that because of the points just made about inefficacy, the Moorean is unlikely to be able to appeal to a causal theory of reference.

he has to explain the correlation between our referential practices and normative properties, he can only do so by appealing to a further correlation between normative properties and non-normative properties that creates a “pre-established harmony” between the correlates.³³ He might even appeal to the same exact proposal—that because survival is good, evolutionary forces have pushed us both to have by-and-large true normative beliefs *and* to successfully refer to normative properties.

3. Metaphysics

Here is where the we stand: The Moorean has been challenged to explain (a) the correlation between normative beliefs and normative facts and (b) the correlation between normative referential practices and normative properties. In both cases, the Moorean can meet the challenge only by appealing to a *further* relation between the normative and the non-normative. For instance, in the epistemic case, Enoch and Skarsaune appeal to the relation between goodness and survival (plus, for the latter, the correlation between survival and pain-avoidance/pleasure-seeking), while Weilenberg appeals to the relation between survival and rights-grounding cognitive faculties.

Unless he is to maintain that there is an infinite regress of such relations, at some point the Moorean must stop. And so at some level, there will be a relation between the normative and the non-normative—a basic, substantive normative fact—that the Moorean cannot explain. Of course, the Moorean might deny that this final, unexplainable explanans must itself be a *correlation* between normative and non-normative factors. Enoch (2011, 144), for example, suggests that survival’s goodness might be explained by the content of some *norm*. But it is clear that whatever explanation the Moorean offers, at some level he will have to stop and admit that there is a relation of *some* kind (other than identity or constitution) between normative and non-normative properties that cannot be explained.

³³ This is precisely what Enoch (2011, 183) suggests.

What we find, then, is that Mooreans have a potential solution to epistemological and semantic challenges to their view. Nevertheless, it is not hard to see how these solutions lead directly to yet *another* challenge—a metaphysical one. Indeed, one might suggest that the epistemological and semantic challenges just are special cases of a broader metaphysical challenge. Consider, for instance, Simon Blackburn’s (1973; 1988) famous objection that non-naturalists cannot explain why the normative supervenes on the non-normative. Such supervenience is, of course, a relation between distinct properties (for the Moorean, at least).³⁴ So, one might plausibly understand Blackburn’s objection to be that Mooreans are incapable of explaining—all the way down—relations between the normative and the non-normative. If we understand the epistemological and semantic challenges as above, and Blackburn’s challenge as just described, then it seems that there is a general challenge to explain relations between the normative and the non-normative, and that the epistemological and semantic challenges are special cases of this challenge, demanding an explanation for the particular (cor)relation between normative beliefs (referential practices) and normative facts (properties).

To be clear, this is not to say that the Moorean hasn’t met the epistemological and semantic challenges without explaining relations all the way down. For it may well be that there are special features of the relations between, say, beliefs and facts that call for explanation in a way that other relations do not. For one thing, we are talking about an immense number of correlations between *each person’s* beliefs and the facts, not just between two properties. Nevertheless, this poses an important dialectical challenge for the Moorean—at least for those who take the epistemological and semantic challenges seriously: Given that he accepts that it would be a problem if he were incapable of explaining the relation in the epistemic case, the Moorean owes us an explanation for why he may

³⁴ As with “facts” vs. “truths” (see note 17, above), I ignore here various issues concerning the nature of properties. On some views, what I’m calling something’s properties might just be something like “properly applied predicates.” This should have no substantive impact on my arguments.

remain comfortable positing *other* relations between the normative and the non-normative that he cannot explain.

So, somewhere down the line, the Moorean will have to appeal to a relation between the normative and the non-normative that he cannot explain. As I have just argued, he must either deny the need to meet the epistemological and semantic challenges in the first place or explain why it is that even though correlations between beliefs and facts cannot be brute, other relations between the normative and the non-normative can.

Supposing he can provide such an explanation, it is important to recognize that the remaining metaphysical challenge is not necessarily a “challenge” at all. After all, for many Mooreans, the commitment to brute, basic normative principles is held to be a feature of the view, rather than a bug. Some, like Parfit (2011), maintain this explicitly and without hesitation. Others, like Enoch, seem to feel a greater need to address the issue. But whatever their attitude, the above discussion serves, in part, to show that the Moorean really is thus committed: He cannot explain relations between the normative and the non-normative all the way down. So our first question should not be whether Mooreans can explain such relations, but rather whether the inability to do so is a bullet that’s too big to bite (or a bullet at all, for that matter).

As Enoch points out, part of what makes this seem to be a bullet is that many people accept (some version of) *Hume’s Dictum* that there are no “necessary relations between distinct existences” (2011, 147).³⁵ For the Moorean, the idea that the normative and the non-normative *are* distinct existences³⁶ is central—arguably, it is just another way of expressing the thought behind AUTONOMY.

³⁵ See Hume (1739), Book I, Part III, Section VI.

³⁶ Though those like Parfit (2011) who are committed to a “non-ontological” version of Moorean realism might object to the term “existences.”

Enoch (2011, 147) thinks that the cost (in plausibility points) of rejecting Hume's Dictum is "completely affordable." He does admit, however, that the objection can be improved by weakening the principle. Tristram McPherson (forthcoming), for example, offers the more modest:

Modest Humean (MH). "Commitment to brute necessary connections between distinct properties counts significantly against a view."³⁷

MH, unlike Hume's Dictum, joins Enoch in making the issue one of "plausibility points" rather than of an absolute metaphysical "deal-breaker." Its other important contribution is the inclusion of bruteness. This is important because the typical counterexamples to Hume's Dictum—things like the necessary relation between triangularity and trilaterality or between Socrates and the singleton set {Socrates}—are not obviously brute; arguably we have something to say about why these properties are always instantiated together, such as concerning the nature of the set-membership relation (Enoch 2011, 147). It is much less plausible, it seems, to claim that certain distinct properties necessarily co-instantiate *for no reason whatsoever*. This lends MH intuitive force that the original Dictum lacks.

Though he admits all this, Enoch does not think that MH is a very good reason to reject his Moorean view. He concludes:

"I accept *some* brute . . . relation here between distinct existences, and so that [Moorean] Realism stand [sic.] in violation of Hume's Dictum. It is *this* result that, I argue, is not intuitively damaging. And if what remains of the venerable supervenience challenge . . . is just the need to reject this piece of metaphysical dogma [i.e., Hume's Dictum or MH], progress has been made. (Enoch 2011, 148)

We seem to be at an impasse. The Moorean insists that there are normative facts consistent with AUTONOMY, INDEPENDENCE and INEFFICACY. He acknowledges that this commits him to the

³⁷ Enoch (2011, 147) quotes here from a draft version of McPherson (forthcoming).

existence of brute normative facts that entail necessary relations between distinct existences. But he denies that this is too high a price to pay. And, indeed, if the only thing standing between the Moorean and success is a piece of “dogma” backed only by vague metaphysical intuitions, it is not hard to see why he would believe the balance of reasons favors his view.

Personally, I am inclined to think that something like MH is true.³⁸ But this is not an issue I can hope to resolve here. What matters for our purposes is that the force of the metaphysical “challenge” to explain relations between the normative and the non-normative seems to rest on MH’s shoulders. I leave the question of whether MH can bear that burden for another time.

4. The Verdict

So, can Moorean realism shoulder its explanatory burden? The answer to this question is: It depends. Primarily, it depends on how high the theoretical costs are of positing brute, necessary relations between the non-normative and the (metaphysically distinct) normative. It also depends on whether the Moorean can construct a plausible enough “just so” story (perhaps like the evolutionary ones discussed here) to vindicate our normative thought, language and practices. It is an open question whether any such particular story can be rendered plausible. What matters for our purposes is just that the possibility of offering such a story remains open, and thus there is arguably no *in principle* problem for Moorean realism along epistemic or semantic lines. This should be welcome news to Mooreans. Indeed, it seems to be about the best they could hope for. Given AUTONOMY, it

³⁸ One option I find tempting is to push for an epistemological analogue—that we must have non-circular, non-question-begging reasons for believing in relations between distinct existences, i.e. that such relations cannot be “epistemically primitive.”

is hard to see how they could hope to meet these challenges *without* appealing to something normative.

Nevertheless, the moves Mooreans have to make to meet the epistemic and semantic challenges only serve to highlight their burden at the metaphysical level. Not only do they postulate brute necessary relations between the normative and the non-normative, but they must appeal to such relations in order to meet challenges in other areas. With all this brutality, the Moorean position can seem profoundly unsatisfying. Many of us hope metanormative theory will offer us more explanatorily powerful answers to our questions in metaphysics, epistemology and semantics. Thus, insofar as such understanding *is* something we continue to hope for, it may well be that we should consider Moorean realism a position of last resort.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to Christian Coons, David Copp, David Enoch, Tristram McPherson, David Shoemaker and Sara Worley for their invaluable comments on this paper.

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