

Moral Facts *Paul Sheehy*

1. Introduction – Meta-Ethics

One part of the study and practice of moral philosophy or ethics belongs to normative ethics.¹ This is concerned with theories and approaches which articulate judgements on how we ought to act or on how we should be. The central concern of normative ethics is an elucidation of what is right, good or virtuous. In the present article we shall turn our attention to meta-ethics. This is the branch of philosophy which aims to understand the nature of moral judgements. Rather than asking what kinds of action are good or right, the question becomes what is it to say of an action that it is good or right? We are not seeking a substantive ethical theory about what is right, but enquiring into what we mean when we say that an action or person or state of affairs is good or right, wrong, bad, cruel, just and so on. There is a concern with the analysis of moral concepts, the relations between them and other (non-moral) concepts and the logic of their use. Perhaps, above all though, are the questions of whether our moral statements are capable of being true or false and of whether we can possess moral knowledge.

2. Realism and Moral Realism

The term 'realism' is used widely and in different contexts. Realism can be characterised as a set of theses about the world and our relationship to it. Understood thus it is conjunction of metaphysical, epistemological and semantic views.² While there is no settled, neat consensus on the details of the commitments of realism, the following captures those views which stake out a realist stance. The world is mind independent with a structure accounting for its fundamental nature; a structure which does not depend upon what we think about it or the concepts we deploy to describe it. The facts about the world are objective. The fundamental metaphysical claim of the realist about *x* is that *x* exists independently of whether it is thought or talked about. Knowledge of the world is possible and we do actually have some knowledge of the world. Language refers to the objects in the world.³ The meaning of a sentence is fixed by its truth conditions, and those conditions are evidence transcendent (semantic realism).

At the risk of compressing a range of claims moral realism is the view that when we make moral judgements we are making claims – uttering sentences - that are capable of being literally true or false; some of which are true; and about which we can make genuine errors. Furthermore, they are true (or false) by virtue of an independently existing moral reality about which we can and do possess knowledge. The realist must ultimately explain the sense in which there is an independent moral reality, but the core of the position is that there are moral *facts*. The realist position is thus opposed to those meta-ethical theories which view our moral statements as expressions of attitude or emotion or as aiming to assert facts, but which all turn out to be false because there are no moral facts to express. To put matters crudely the realist holds that our moral beliefs and judgements are about a special class of facts – the moral facts – and it is these facts which underpin the truth of our moral beliefs. The anti-realist ultimately offers an analysis of the nature and meaning of our moral judgements in terms of our

attitudes, emotions and opinions, which are typically shaped by the prevailing conventions of our society.

- A full-blown moral realism has then these commitments:⁴
- There exist moral facts and they are distinct class of facts.
- We possess moral knowledge, which is to have knowledge of (some of) the moral facts.
- Realists hold that moral facts are objective, or independent of any beliefs or thoughts we might have about them. What is right is not determined by what I or anybody else thinks is right. It is not even determined by what we all think is right, even if we could be got to agree. To take an example from Jonathan Dancy, we cannot make actions right by agreeing that they are, any more than we can make bombs safe by agreeing that they are.⁵
- It is possible for us to make mistakes about what is right and what is wrong. So what people conscientiously decide they should do may not be the same as what they should do.

The basic question is whether realism represents our best understanding of moral discourse and the ways in which moral judgements relate to the domain of human interaction and the natural world. In order to understand the motivation for endorsing realism and the plausibility of doing so a series of related questions must be considered.

In the present paper I shall focus on the question that perhaps arises immediately and most obviously. What kind of fact is a moral fact? While I shall not here address the further and related issues, a fully worked out realist answer must ensure that it can accommodate an explanation of: (i) the epistemology of moral realism - what account can be provided of how we acquire moral knowledge? (ii) the relationship between moral judgement and motivation - what is the role of moral judgement in our moral psychology? After all, we ordinarily think that judging something to be, say, wrong plays a role in our coming to have a motivation to act.⁶

3. *Why Realism?*

The realist can point out that taking our moral statements as aiming to report the facts and sometimes succeeding in doing so conforms with the appearance of our moral talk and experience. A moral judgement takes propositional form. I believe, judge, say, hold that something is right or wrong. If we take the surface form of our talk seriously then there is an immediate appeal to realism. For the form of our moral talk looks to be explained in terms of its role in stating the moral facts. When I explain to my colleagues in the sociology department that we should discourage bored teenagers from casually burning dogs during the summer vacation I do not appeal to the damaging effects of dog-burning on suburban culture. Nor do I justify my assertion by pointing out that it is a commitment which sincerely expresses my strongly held attitude about the way to treat beasts. Rather, people should not burn dogs because it

is wrong to do so: it is a fact about the kind of world we inhabit that the wanton destruction of life and value is a bad, wrong or vicious act.

Now, of course my interlocutor might dispute the claim that some practice is wrong, state of affairs morally bad or disposition of character vicious. In our moral judgements and discourse we are ordinarily concerned that we get the answers to moral questions right. It matters that my judgement is true that my friend has acted in a morally deplorable way by cuckolding his brother. For to hold someone blame or praiseworthy and to conduct oneself accordingly with respect to them is a weighty matter. It is not an issue confined to the study or classroom, but a question of how one engages with others. The justification, explanation and perhaps motivation for the way I interact and treat others in light of their deeds and attitudes is how they are morally. The how-they-are is not a matter of mere opinion or feeling, but of the moral facts. The explanation and justification of the criticism of my friend is that it is literally true that it is wrong (other things being equal) to sleep with your brother's wife.

These considerations point to a closely related and common feature of our moral talk: disagreement. If we genuinely disagree whether some action is right then this appears to suppose that there is a domain of moral facts about which we can form beliefs and about which we can be mistaken. When I dispute the moral acceptability of abortion with a colleague it does not seem that either of us takes the discussion to be an idle one in the sense that there is no answer to be had. Each of us begins by believing that he has a better understanding of the facts and seeks to explain to the other why he is in error. Our moral talk has a structure presupposing that the correct answers are in principle accessible to all. Moral judgement is objective and the object of moral enquiry and judgement is to establish the facts of the matter - or at least aiming to get closer to an understanding thereof. '(T)he way in which we conduct ourselves in living the moral life seems to presuppose that these (moral) facts are available to all...we seem to think that moral questions have correct answers'.⁷

If morality is objective in this way, then it makes sense of the idea of progress as well as the possibility of error. Pointing to the parallel with scientific progress the realist may suggest that things can improve morally as we come to acquire moral knowledge. Just as science progresses as our theories approximate more closely to the facts about the natural world, so we can progress morally as we gain in our moral knowledge. Of course the possibility of moral progress and improvement through a growth in knowledge is not to say that progress will be smooth, easy or sustained. The realist point is not that we are making inevitable moral progress, but that there is an explanation available of what it means to talk of such progress.

For present purposes let us grant that there is a *prima facie* motivation for realism. Its opponent is well stocked with arguments to show that we ought to understand morality in terms of subjective opinion, expressions of attitude and emotion and in terms of defeasible social conventions. I shall leave to another occasion the positive arguments for anti-realism. In the remaining sections of the present article I turn to a challenge that the realist must immediately answer: what kind of facts are these allegedly moral facts? For in the absence of a satisfactory response the initial motivation to be a realist may drain away.

4. *What Kind of Facts?*

A realist who is a naturalist holds that moral facts are identical with (or reducible to) natural facts. Moral propositions report or describe how things are in the world - what moral properties are possessed by a person or state. Moral properties such as goodness are just natural properties (or a complex of natural properties). A natural property is the kind which features in, is the subject matter of the natural and social sciences. In stating a moral truth I am describing how things are from a perspective of moral concern or interest. In explaining why torture is wrong I employ moral concepts rather than give a technical neurophysiological account of the brain states of the victim. However, my moral judgement describes a naturalistic state of affairs. Moral properties and the facts about morality are not special or *sui generis* in the sense that they refer to states of affairs which transcend or fall outside of the scope of the natural and social sciences. While moral facts are a distinct class of facts about the normative and evaluative dimension of events, character, judgement and states they are not mysterious in the sense that true moral propositions refer to states, properties or facts which are not natural.

An Aristotelian, for example, regards the good or virtuous life to be one in which the individual exhibits a certain complex of natural properties - manifest in the development of their character (psychology). A hedonic utilitarian identifies goodness with happiness. A more sophisticated articulation of naturalism in ethics through a form of consequentialism sees the property of being good as the property of conducing to the prevalence of a complex and clustered group of properties of things which go to satisfy important human needs.⁸

A naturalistic approach explains the metaphysics of moral properties - they are identical (or reducible to) with natural properties - and it explains how we can come to have knowledge of them. We can know about the moral facts via the same (sensory) means through which we gain knowledge of any other natural fact. Now, this is not to say that moral knowledge is easily gained, but that there is nothing mysterious involved in obtaining it. Perhaps, we shall need to combine the best scientific and moral theories to make epistemological progress in ethics.

An influential criticism of naturalism from within the realist camp was famously developed by G.E. Moore in the early years of the twentieth century. His challenge was to the very possibility of identifying moral and natural properties.⁹ Moore believed that much of ethical thinking about the nature of moral judgements rested on what he called 'the naturalistic fallacy'. Simply put the 'fallacy' is committed in the identification of the simple, non-natural property of goodness with some natural property. Moore defines naturalism in terms of that which can be the object of experience and which is the subject matter the natural sciences and also psychology.¹⁰ According to Moore most philosophers have conflated the property of goodness with the things that possess it or with some other property(s) that good things have.

It may be true that all things which are good are also something else...But far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not 'other', but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. This view I propose to call the naturalistic fallacy.¹¹

Moore's positive thesis concerns the nature of 'good'. We cannot define 'good' in more basic terms because it is a simple and unanalysable property. Engaging in certain actions may be virtuous because they bring about states that are good in themselves. A right action is one that produces the greatest possible amount of that which is good in itself. To be good is to possess intrinsic value. Moreover, we know a good action or state when we encounter it. Moore suggests an analogy with colour. We can come to know what 'yellow' is through direct acquaintance with yellow objects. No definition of yellow (in, say, terms of wavelength) can convey to someone who has never encountered it what yellow is. In this respect good is like yellow. You only know it when you encounter it. While yellow is a simple natural property, goodness is a simple non-natural property. A natural property like yellow, being desired or being productive of happiness exists in space and time and can feature in the empirical investigation of the world. A non-natural property will not show up when we examine the structure of the natural world. All there is to be said in our empirical investigation of nature can be said in the language of science (not quite how Moore puts the point).

What then is the relationship between the natural and non-natural properties or facts? After all, if two sets of natural facts are identical we should hold that the moral facts are the same. For if two states are identical with respect to the natural facts, then there seems to be nothing salient which could give rise to a difference in the moral or evaluative quality of the states. Consider, two identical instances of torture being inflicted upon the innocent. Here the realist can appeal to the notion of supervenience, which was introduced into the contemporary philosophical lexicon by Hare (not a realist), according to whom all evaluative predicates supervene on the 'descriptive' characteristics of something. This is the thesis that one domain of phenomena (D1) depends entirely on another (D2) even though there are no systematic links between them, and in particular even though there is no causal relationship between D2 and D1. The state of D1 is given by the state of D2, and there can be no change in D1 without some change in D2 (although the converse relation does not hold). No two things (e.g. persons, acts, states of affairs) can differ in evaluative terms without also differing in their non-evaluative properties. Although the term was never used by Moore, the idea of a non-reductive relation of dependency is reflected in the anti-naturalistic thesis that 'good' stands for a non-natural property.¹²

How are we to account for moral knowledge if moral facts are non-natural? Moore holds that when we are presented with something good our judgement of value is self-evident. In judging something to be good - to use a Moorean example, that artistic beauty is good in itself - is to possess a belief I just know to be true, but for which there are no further reasons to be given. This appeal to self-evidence may not strike you as compelling. What if A and B sincerely disagree over what is self-evident?¹³ We might insist that something be said to elucidate how it is that one just knows of certain judgements that they are true. Moore uses the term 'intuition' to refer to our direct awareness of goodness. However, he is not suggesting that we have some special faculty of moral intuition or perception (akin to say sight) through which we cognize moral truths. As he says, 'when I call such propositions 'Intuitions' I mean merely to assert that they are incapable of proof: I imply nothing whatever as to the manner or origin of our cognition of them'.

5. *The Open Question Argument*

The key element in Moore's criticism of naturalism is his Open Question Argument ('OQA'). Suppose, Moore says, goodness were identical with some other property. Let us say that goodness is identical with the promotion of happiness (His own example is what we desire to desire). Now 'good' and 'happiness' are synonymous and every competent speaker would therefore know that:

NI good = df the promotion of happiness.¹⁴

It now follows that to ask 'is that which promotes happiness good?' demonstrates a lack of understanding or sense on the part of the enquirer. It is not a real or live question. For, given our definition of good, it is just the same as asking 'is that which is good, good?' However, Moore explains that it is always an **open question** to ask of some act or state whether it is good or not. To ask if promoting happiness is good is always a live or open enquiry. So, 'good' does not just mean the promotion of happiness (or whatever natural property(s)) and NI is false.

One criticism faced by the OQA is that it does not establish what is needed to rule out a naturalist realism. The naturalist claim it challenges is that moral facts and properties can be identified with non-moral, natural facts and properties. That is a metaphysical thesis. Perhaps all the OQA can establish is that moral and non-moral terms are not synonyms or interdefined; it does show that NI fails to express an analytic judgement. Understanding what one term means does not entail that one understand what the other means. A genuinely 'closed' question is whether a bachelor is an unmarried. I can only ask this question if I am not a competent user of the term 'bachelor'. In learning what the word means I just learn that a bachelor is an unmarried male. However, it is clear that not all meanings (or truths) are analytic in this way.¹⁵ To point out that it is not analytic that good is the promotion of happiness does not yet establish that the moral fact is not just identical to a natural one.

Let's consider non-moral cases. I may know a lot about vixens. They are animals, they eat chickens and people have hunted them. Yet, I can still sensibly ask whether a vixen is a female fox should I be ignorant of that fact about foxes. Of course, once I learn that 'vixen' and 'female fox' refer to the very same kind of beast the question falls away. Once I come to understand the term 'vixen' I cannot fail to know that this is a female kind of beast. Likewise, a person ignorant of modern chemistry may know a great deal about water yet sensibly ask in his first science class whether the wet stuff of his acquaintance is H₂O. Empirical investigation is required to establish the facts, to illuminate how things are. So with moral facts. The metaphysical truth of what they are cannot be simply read off from the words we employ. 'Good' may not be synonymous with the 'promotion of happiness', but they might both refer to the very same property. NI should not be seen as stating a proposition which is analytic - true in virtue of the meanings of the terms or symbols involved. Rather, such a statement is a synthetic one. Further, given the necessity of identity, a naturalist might go on to argue that a moral property is identical with a natural one and that this is an a *posteriori* necessity.

The response to the Moorean challenge is to note that the central element in realism is a metaphysical thesis. A moral (M) and natural property (N) may be identical.

However, the fact of the identity does not entail that M and N possess the very same meaning. It is not an analytic truth that M is N, it does not follow from the meanings of the terms involved. Nor is it knowable *a priori* that M = N. Here, the naturalist can point to the similarity with other cases of property identity: for example, the property of being water and the property of being H₂O; or temperature and mean molecular kinetic energy. From the meaning of the first term I cannot just read off the second. Instead I have to go and discover (say by paying attention in science classes) that the terms refer to the very same thing.

However, this form of naturalist response may itself face problems. 'Good' is just not like water or heat or any other natural kind term in a way that allows it to be analysed in the same kind of way and to preserve the character that realism requires of it.¹⁶ Very roughly here's how such an argument might go.¹⁷

- Water picks out the wet stuff which is H₂O and has done so since we began to employ the concept. Our use of the concept is directed by the nature of that stuff. At some point we discovered the chemical composition of water and so learnt that water is H₂O.
- We can imagine a distant world, Twin-Earth, or remote part of this planet isolated from the rest of us, in which 'water' refers to the wet, odourless and so on stuff which directs or determines the use of the concept.¹⁸ The twin earth term 'water' figures in the lives, descriptions and explanations of the people there just as water does in ours. However, while all else in the same on twin Earth as it is here, the wet stuff on Twin Earth has a completely different chemical composition. It is composed of some other combination of elements, say 'XYZ'. What twin-earthers mean and what we mean by 'water' is different (so this story goes) because the meaning of the term is determined by the nature or essence of the stuff to which it refers.
- This might cause some confusion at first and we might appear to disagree about the meaning of 'water'. However, such disputes are resolved by pointing out that the terms, the concepts employed and the thoughts in our heads are actually referring to different stuffs. I don't think that my twin earth interlocutor is wrong when he talks of 'water', but that he is talking about something else.

Now, let's grant that here (on Earth; in our moral community) the property of being right is identical with the property of promoting happiness. After much investigation it has turned out that the utilitarians were correct all along. We can imagine a community (on say moral Twin Earth) in which the concept of right is identical with something else - for example, Kantian deontology or the promotion of the glory of the philosopher king or the assertion of individual power. As in the water case the term 'good' and the cluster of moral concepts around it play the same kind of role on Twin Earth as moral concepts do on Earth. Just as in the water case there are different properties responsible for the use of and denoted by the shared, orthographically identical term. However, the parallel with the natural kind term cannot be sustained.

- In the utilitarian world it is good or right to help strangers because it promotes general happiness. On moral Twin Earth let it be good to exploit strangers because goodness is the property of asserting individual power.
- On arriving in the other community you can check with your hosts that your grasp of the term 'good' is shared. All agree that it just means 'the most general term of commendation', and you can agree that the moral terms play the same kind of role in both communities - for example to praise and blame, determine the justice of actions and so on. Yet, they would be puzzled by the instances in which you use 'good' and you would be equally surprised when they employed it.
- The states that determine the use of good and right are radically distinct for the different communities. If, as in the water case, we are to explain away the appearance of disagreement, then this suggests that naturalistic arguments tend towards a radical relativism. If on the other hand we hold there to be genuine disagreement, then we must mean the same thing by terms such as 'right' and 'goodness'. Yet, this metaphysical naturalism does not seem to allow for that since the natural properties determining the use of the concept vary across the communities.

The argument aims to suggest that even when a natural property directs and controls the use of a moral concept, the identity of goodness with such a natural property does not capture fully what we understand and mean by goodness. Is this a good argument against naturalist realism? What can the realist say? There is more to be said here of course. For the moment, though, I want to briefly address the naturalist claim, dismissed rather quickly earlier, that realism is in the business of providing an informative, reductive analysis of moral concepts.

6. *Definition Naturalism*

Definitional naturalism is

(T)he view that we can define moral terms exclusively in terms apt for describing the subject matter of the natural and social sciences. The catch cry of definitional naturalism is not just analysis, but *reductive* analysis. We must first define moral terms in non-moral terms, and then we must make sure that all of the non-moral terms in our definition are themselves thoroughly naturalistic.¹⁹

Moore thinks it is not possible to give a naturalistic definition of a moral term (M) such as good.²⁰ If we define 'good' as some natural property (N), it nonetheless does not seem contradictory to assert that something, x, has N but is not good. However if there is such a naturalistic definition of M, then it would have to be self-contradictory to assert that x has N, but is not M just as it is to say that Bob is not unmarried, but is a bachelor. The force of the OQA against definitional naturalism hangs on the premise that there is no naturalistic definition of good such that it is a contradiction to claim that x has N but is not good. Moore's challenge is that in providing a conceptual analysis of the concept of goodness we are unable to capture our understanding of it in naturalistic terms.

The definitional naturalist is engaged in conceptual analysis. Quite in general this involves furnishing an analysis or explanation of a concept, C, through the use of another concept(s), C1. Examples include the analysis of knowledge as justified true belief, the analysis of material objects as statements about sense data, the analysis of mental states as (complex) dispositions to behave. In all such cases it looks like an open question can be asked. This points to what has come to be known as the paradox of analysis.

In looking to analyse C we seek a concept C1 that will provide us with something new and informative about C.

The claim then that C is analytically (definitionally) equivalent to C1 must be unobvious, and so informative.

But, C1 must really be analytically equivalent to C and so it cannot really tell us anything we don't know already.

So, either the attempt to provide an analysis of concepts does lead to an open question and to the failure of a definitional analysis or analysis is just trivial and uninformative. After all, knowing that bachelors are unmarried tells us nothing about the world.

Does this suggest that the OQA is still on its feet? That is too hasty. We might regard this kind of naturalistic conceptual analysis as aiming to explain (in less problematic terms) the set of beliefs and judgements which constitute the possession of a concept, C. Such an analysis may well be unobvious and it will be informative. Moreover, a full grasp of the analysis will foreclose the question of whether some x falling under C also falls under C1. The burden may well be on the naturalist to furnish such an account. However, Moore's argument (and indeed Ayer's later employment of it for anti-realist ends), does not do enough to show that there will always be an open question. Perhaps, everything we say about x in terms of C can be said in terms of C1. Indeed, to the extent that we can analyse x in less philosophically problematic terms, the employment of C1 is arguably to be taken as progress.

Moore was, though, on to something important in the OQA. Perhaps, the problem is not that there is always the open question of whether, notwithstanding that x has N, x is M. Instead, it may be that in providing a naturalistic analysis of M, something essential in our characterisation and understanding of M is lost.

7. Against Non-Naturalistic Realism

Ayer believed he has a quite devastating criticism of a realist claim that moral facts are non-natural.²¹ Such purported facts violate the principles of logical positivism and so are meaningless. According to positivism a sentence is factually significant if and only if the proposition it expresses is empirically verifiable - at its most basic a proposition is verifiable only if there are observation statements against which its truth or falsity can be tested. Since Ayer took non-naturalism to entail intuitionism - the thesis that we have a faculty of moral intuition or sense that allows us to cognize moral truths - there would appear to be no way to verify the truth or falsity of moral claims against empirical data. That I utter that something is good can be verified, but

the self-evidence of the judgement I make through my possession of moral sense eludes any such criterion of meaningfulness. It will suffice for the moment to observe that a criticism of non-naturalism grounded in a (now) controversial and problematic theory of meaning is hardly obviously compelling.²²

Unsurprisingly, these remarks do not leave non-naturalism in the clear. What Ayer was right to worry about was how the non-naturalist can account for the realist claim that we can have knowledge of the moral facts, and how those non-natural moral facts relate to or fit in to the natural world. A focus for these worries is provided by the claim that the moral facts supervene on the natural facts (this is often put in terms of the evaluative or normative facts supervening on the descriptive facts). The realist supposes the following claims are true.

- (Sup) Moral facts or properties supervene on natural/ descriptive ones.
- (Equiv) No two things exactly similar in their natural properties can differ solely in their moral ones.

The first claim seems incontrovertible if the realist wants to locate the moral facts within the spatio-temporal realm in a way that relates them to objects and actions in nature. Indeed, 'everyone agrees that the moral features of things supervene on their natural features.....It is an *a priori* truth'.²³ The second claim seems essential to any realism. If Bob, in a particular set of circumstances (C), kills old ladies for fun and we judge it to be wrong, then when in C Mary also kills old ladies for fun we must also judge her actions to be wrong.

The non-naturalist makes the further claims that:

- (NN) Moral facts or properties are not identical with natural ones.
- (MK) In gaining moral knowledge we do not infer the moral facts from the presence of natural properties.

The non-naturalist holds that the relationship between natural and moral properties is not a causal one. The natural properties involved in the killing do not cause the wrongness of the action. Rather the wrongness consists in (somehow) the killing, or that the killing gives rise to (somehow) the wrongness. Nor is the natural/non-natural relationship one of logical entailment. It would not involve a logical contradiction hear the tale of Bob and conclude that his actions were right or that he is good man. Nor do we somehow infer from the presence of certain natural properties the moral facts at hand. When I see the gang of children viciously burn the dog my knowledge that they are doing wrong through being wantonly cruel is not arrived at by a process of inference. Instead, I judge or 'see' that they are wrong immediately from their actions. A comparison with aesthetic experience is open to the realist. We do not infer the face and beauty of the Mona Lisa from the arrangement of paint strokes, but rather we see the face.²⁴

These two claims express the autonomy of moral facts and properties. Yet MK is in tension with Equiv. If the wrongness of Bob's action is not to be inferred from its

natural or descriptive properties then its possession of a particular moral property is not entailed by the action possessing certain natural properties. So, Bob and Paul may act in exactly same way in the same circumstances (i.e. share exactly the same descriptive or natural properties) yet not share the same moral property. If the non-naturalist denies Equiv, then he must also give up the supervenience claim.

The critic can also press the question of what special faculty we must possess in order to see the moral facts. If we somehow read off the moral character of a situation from the non-moral facts, then what is the relationship between them and the person making the judgement?

Furthermore, while all sides may agree that two situations identical in every descriptive respect cannot differ just in their moral properties, the non-naturalist still owes an account of the relationship between the natural and the moral facts. It is not just that we know of particular situations with which we are actually confronted that they have a certain moral character, but we form judgements in reflection and imaginative reconstruction. Since the relationship between the natural and moral properties is neither a causal one nor one of logical entailment, the explanation of why a certain configuration of natural facts is accompanied by or gives rise to certain moral facts continues to be absent. As it stands non-naturalism seems unable to explain why it is *a priori* that the moral facts supervene on natural facts. The intimacy between the natural and moral facts is, on the face of things, left mysterious.

In sketching the motivation and challenges moral realism faces I have failed to do justice to the sophistication, range and complexity of the positions that characterise meta-ethical enquiry. That task is yours, and in approaching it you may find it helpful to consider where the challenges adumbrated here leave the realist thesis.

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¹ In talking about morality in a very general way, I make no attempt to draw any distinction between 'morality' as rule based and 'ethics' as a way of being or outlook. For a discussion of the relationship between ethics and morality see chapter 1 (esp pp.6-7) of Bernard Williams' *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985).

² One might immediately enquire whether they must come together. That is a discussion for another day.

³ Must this lead us to the correspondence theory of truth? That is to a theory of truth which maintains a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to the facts/states/how the world is - pick your favoured truth maker. See Geoffrey Thomas *An Introduction to Ethics* (London: Duckworth, 1993) pp.118-120 for related discussion. On truth makers see Peter Simons 'Criticism, Renewal and the Future of Metaphysics', *Richmond Journal of Philosophy* 6 (2004).

⁴ For an influential statement of such a red-blooded realism see Mark Platts, 'Moral Reality' in his *Ways of Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1979).

⁵ Dancy's entry on moral realism in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy is an excellent introduction to this topic. A fine and comprehensive overview of contemporary metaethics is Alexander Miller, *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

⁶ An objection to moral realism due to John Mackie is that moral properties would just be too 'queer' in the sense that they would be so very different from the kinds of things we find in the natural world. See his *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977) chap. 1. Mackie takes it that realism about moral properties would require moral facts to be about Platonic forms – objects outside of space

and time. Therefore, according to Mackie it is mysterious how such facts fit into a naturalistic account of the world, our knowledge of it and of how such facts could be essentially motivating.

⁷ Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) pp. 5-6.

⁸ C.f. David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁹ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

¹⁰ Ibid. §25-26

¹¹ Ibid. §10

¹² A point Moore makes in his 1922 'The Concept of Value' in *Philosophical Studies*.

¹³ For a clear discussion on the problem posed by Moore's suggestion (§86) that judgements of value are just self-evident see Richard Norman, *The Moral Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 2nd ed. pp. 161-162.

¹⁴ In defining a term (A) one provides an equivalent term (B) that can replace the defined term (A) in all contexts in which it occurs without changing meaning or truth value. The symbol for this is '=df'.

¹⁵ An analytic proposition is one whose truth is determined simply by the concepts used in their expression. An analytic statement such as 'nothing is blue and not blue' is true just in virtue of the meanings of the words involved.

¹⁶ The simple idea is that a natural kind represents a real division or cleavage in the world to which our taxonomic scheme must conform if it is to accurately report the ordering of things. A natural kind records a real distinction in nature around which theories are constructed. It would seem then that natural kinds are to be contrasted with categorisations produced through convention or to serve some interest or function. Note that the distinction between natural and non-natural kinds recalls Locke's distinction between real and nominal essences. The former is whatever it is that accounts for the characteristic form and nature of some kind of thing, whilst the latter is merely the set of properties by which we distinguish objects belonging to that kind. Diamonds may be characterised in terms of their hardness, transparency and clarity, but their real essence is given by their microstructure, which reveals that they are carbon. Once we have the facts about something's microstructure we can class it together with other individuals of that type, and the question of whether something counts as one of this kind becomes answerable by whether it bears the appropriate sameness relation with respect to its essential (microstructural) properties. In virtue of the nature of a kind predicates about things of this kind can be formulated and (successful) predictions made possible; a kind's real essence underwrites the lawlike possession of properties and the characteristic behaviour of tokens of that kind.

¹⁷ See Horgan and Timmons 'Troubles on Moral Twin-Earth: Moral Queerness Revived' in *Synthese* 92, 1992. Their view goes much less roughly.

¹⁸ c.f. Putman and his famous Twin Earth thought experiment in 'The Meaning of Meaning'

¹⁹ Smith op cit. pp.35-36.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that A.J.Ayer makes use of the OQA in *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1936) in order to oppose realism in favour of his expressivism. The realist thesis that moral judgements describe or report the facts is, Ayer claims, caught on the horns of a dilemma, which it is unable to escape. Naturalism succumbs to the Open Question Argument and commits the naturalistic fallacy (so, to that extent Ayer agrees with Moore). Non-naturalism is rejected because it violates the principle of verification.

²¹ Ayer op cit. chap 6.

²² For a defence of Ayer and positivism see Pierre Cruse, 'On Language, Truth and Logic', *Richmond Journal of Philosophy* 6 (2004).

²³ Smith op cit. pp.21-22.

²⁴ Platts op cit. draws on such a comparison. Does this help the realist?