

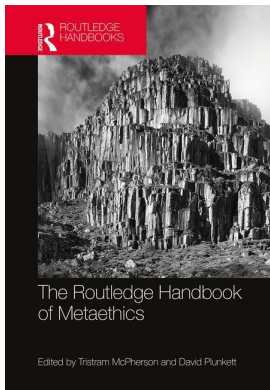
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Central Organizing Options in Metaethics

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1

Non-Naturalistic Realism in Metaethics

David Enoch

Forget metaethics for a second. Think about the naïve realist about the outside world, say, or the naïve realist about abstract objects (a Platonist, perhaps). According to such naïve realists, when we talk and speak of objects in the outside world, or of abstract objects, what we *attempt* to do is to latch onto parts of reality that are out there, independent of us and our talking and thinking about them; and furthermore, in our better moments—when we succeed in thinking and talking in this way—what we think and say is straightforwardly true, as these objects and properties really are out there.

Now think of the average weight of the male, middle-aged analytic philosopher. Most of us are, I take it, naïve realists about it. We think that, for instance, the average weight of the male, middle-aged analytic philosopher is above 130 pounds. And we think that this is true independently of our thinking or talking about it. But we also think that there's nothing ontologically *exciting* about the average weight of the male, middle-aged analytic philosopher. We don't, for instance, feel a temptation to introduce this property into the so-called fabric of the universe. The reason is simple. While it's true that the average weight of the male, middle-aged analytic philosopher is over 130 pounds, this is true *entirely in virtue of* some other things being true—namely, a bunch of facts about particular male, middle-aged analytic philosophers and their weight. Facts about average weight are reducible to, or grounded in, or consist in, or are constituted by, facts about particular people's weight. Ontologically speaking, there seems to be nothing more involved in the former than the latter.

A good first pass at characterizing non-naturalist realism (sometimes called Platonism, or Robust Realism, or Moorean Realism) in metaethics is this, then: Like naïve realists elsewhere, the non-naturalist realist thinks of the relevant domain—in this case, moral thinking and talking—as entirely representational, attempting to capture a reality—now, moral reality—that is out there independently of our talking and thinking about it. Furthermore, the non-naturalist realist also thinks that in our better moments this attempt succeeds—that we do manage to think and utter straightforward truths about

these normative facts and properties, as they do exist. On top of this, the non-naturalist realist thinks of moral facts, properties, and objects as ontologically exciting at least in the sense that they are unlike facts about the average weight of the male, middle-aged analytic philosopher: They are not reducible to or entirely grounded in other, non-moral facts, properties, and objects.

Now, philosophical isms are often hard to capture in a neat definition, and often enough it's futile to even try. Coming up with a clean, uncontroversial characterization of naturalism, for instance, is impossible, and the same goes for realism. So we shouldn't have higher hopes for a characterization of non-naturalist realism. Still, the above is a good start. And another good start would be to contrast, already at this early stage, non-naturalist realism with other metaethical views (rather crudely understood; many of these views are presented in much more detail elsewhere in this volume). Unlike *non-cognitivists* or *expressivists*, non-naturalist realists think that moral or normative talk is fully representational, that it is fully and straightforwardly fact-stating and truth-evaluable, that it expresses beliefs, that it attempts to describe the normative part of the universe. Unlike *response-dependence* theorists, non-naturalist realists believe that moral and normative facts are, well, independent of us and our responses. At least in this sense, non-naturalists defend morality's objectivity (see Billy Dunaway's chapter "Realism and Objectivity"). Furthermore, it's not just *our* responses that are ruled out here—even if there is a God, according to non-naturalist realists the moral and normative facts do not constitutively depend on Her responses either; thus, non-naturalists reject *Divine Command Theory* as well. Unlike *constructivists*, non-naturalist realists believe that normative facts are not made true by our decision-making procedures, or by our endorsing them, or by anything about us and our perspectives; unlike *naturalist realists*, non-naturalist realists don't think that normative and moral facts and properties are reducible to, or are entirely grounded in, or are nothing over and above, or can be given a real definition in terms of, run-of-the-mill natural facts (whatever exactly those are). Often this also means that non-naturalists think of moral facts as causally inert (for causal powers are arguably among the signs of the natural). And while *error theorists* are typically on the same page as non-naturalist realists in understanding the commitments of moral discourse and practice—they agree, for instance, that no "softer" interpretation of it, along naturalist or expressivist or constructivist lines, does it justice—still non-naturalist realists think, and error theorists reject, that, so to speak, the universe keeps its end of the deal: Non-naturalists believe that moral discourse, understood in this way, captures some non-trivial truths; error theorists differ.

In the rest of this contribution, I hope to accomplish the following: explain why there's a sense in which such realism is the view to beat, as it were, even before doing serious metaethics (Section 1); explain why, still, so many people reject this view, and some, vehemently (Section 2); revisit the characterization of the view and raise some doubts about it (Section 3); and briefly sketch arguments for the view (Section 4).

OBVIOUSLY, THE DEFAULT POSITION

There's a sense in which non-naturalist realism has to be the starting point: Other views enter the field, as it were, on the strength of some argument; non-naturalist

realism is the default position, and arguments are needed to defeat it, not so much to establish it. How so?

The first thing to note is that moral (and more broadly, normative) language behaves very much like other representational language. Linguistically speaking, it is very hard to tell apart “Gender discrimination is common” and “Gender discrimination is wrong.” We are pre-theoretically just as happy to assert (or deny) one as the other; to negate them; to incorporate them in propositional attitude reports and related locutions (She’s not sure that gender discrimination is common; He agrees that gender discrimination is wrong; She believes both that gender discrimination is common, and that it’s wrong, but she believes the latter more confidently than the former); we’re happy to assign them truth values, to engage in (seemingly meaningful) disagreements about the wrongness of gender discrimination just as much as about its ubiquity; to speak of the property of wrongness (as I just did); and so on. Non-naturalist realists, then, can take language here at face value. True, they are not the only ones who can do this here—so can, perhaps, some naturalist realists, some constructivists, and also some error theorists (and perhaps others as well). Furthermore, it’s not clear how much weight we should give, at the end of the day, to taking language at face value. Perhaps, somewhat metaphorically, language sometimes deceives us (see, for instance, Dennett’s [1978: xix–xx] discussion of “fatigues”). Still, if we are to conclude that language does deceive us, we would need convincing. Going with face value seems to be the default. And non-naturalist realism (though not only non-naturalist realism) does that.

Another often-made point is that moral discourse seems to exhibit *objective purport*. We are (within some constraints) comfortable applying moral standards (for instance, via moral criticism) to many others, without first inquiring about their own moral inclinations, and we don’t withdraw once we find out that their moral commitments differ from ours (if we think that it’s wrong for an academic committee to apply stricter standards in promoting women than in promoting men, and we then find out that the committee members are actually committed to male academic supremacy, we don’t withdraw our criticism—in fact, we strengthen it). We seem to endorse—pre-theoretically—counterfactuals that do not sit well with response-dependence (if eating meat is morally wrong, then presumably it would have been wrong even had no one ever acknowledged its wrongness). And we treat moral disagreement as *serious* disagreement—if you think that (given current circumstances) our appointments committee should engage in affirmative action and I think that it should not, we seem to be contradicting each other, only one of us can be right, we will proceed to offer what looks like arguments and evidence supporting the relevant position, and so on. In all these ways, moral discourse at least purports to be objective in roughly the way usual empirical discourse is (other differences remain, of course), and clearly contrasts with discourses that are (presumably) paradigmatically non-objective, such as about tastiness, coolness, or yuckiness (see Enoch 2014 for some comparative discussion). Again, this will certainly not get us all the way to non-naturalist realism. And once again, perhaps at the end of the day, we are going to have to conclude (with some error theorists, perhaps) that the claim to objectivity is illusory. But if we are to go down that road, we will need convincing. The default position is with the objective purport of moral discourse.

How, by the way, are such references to the objective purport of moral discourse compatible with the just-as-common complaints about “sophomore relativism,” perhaps

more an attitude to morality than a serious view, according to which, in some sense, when it comes to morality it's all a matter of convention, or perhaps even of personal preferences? I think—and I think that this is what most metaethicists think—that the commitments that come along with objective purport represent the deeper, in some sense more authentic, commitments of even the sophomore who, under the corrupting effects of some post-modern rhetoric, thinks that she doesn't accept morality's objectivity. But perhaps more should be said here.

But of course, talk of the average weight of the male, middle-aged analytic philosopher also exhibits objective purport, and yet no one (presumably) is a non-naturalist about it. Objectivity of the relevant kind, in other words, seems entirely consistent with a naturalist reduction, or grounding, or some such. So it's important to see that, even here, non-naturalist realism remains the default position. To see this, think of paradigmatically moral or normative facts and properties (if there are any, that is), and notice how different they are from paradigmatic natural ones. In the first group we have such things as the wrongness of humiliation; the value of dignity; the fact that it's wrong to take pride in one's social status; the fact that you have a reason to desire those things that are desirable; that you have a reason not to believe a contradiction; that it's virtuous to overcome fear in the face of danger (in the right circumstances, for the right reasons, to the right extent). In the second group, we have things like electrons and quarks, tables and chairs, the ubiquity of gender discrimination, the average weight of the male middle-aged analytic philosopher, the fact that the glaciers are melting, the current exchange rate between US dollars and the New Israeli Shekel, and so on. When we consider these two groups of facts, properties, and objects, it becomes clear that the two are very different. The difference seems like a difference *of kind*. True, there are borderline cases (like, perhaps, the fact that the heart's function is to pump blood, or that close relationships are healthy for humans). And perhaps, under the pressure of argument, we are going to have to accept that some of the members of the first group are really, at bottom, members of the second (or are reducible to them, or entirely grounded in them, or are constituted by them, or some such). But this is going to take the pressure of argument. Non-naturalism remains, in this way too, the view to beat.

This is sometimes obstructed by failing to distinguish between what we may call *formal* and *full-blooded* normativity (McPherson 2011; Enoch manuscript). Formal normativity is present whenever there are any relevant criteria of correctness at all. Set up a game—no one is allowed to step on the lines—and immediately some actions are correct (stepping between the lines) and some aren't (stepping on the lines). And this suffices for some normative-sounding language (“No, you shouldn't step on the lines!”, “Yeah, you're okay, you didn't step on any line,” and so on). This kind of normativity is very, very common—whenever people talk of any kind of rule or standard, whenever they engage in games or practices, or take part in institutions, there are some correctness conditions. And perhaps something similar is going on with certain evaluations—perhaps, for instance, the evaluative standards for motorcycles fall out of an understanding of what a motorcycle is, in a way roughly analogous to that in which the correctness conditions for moves in a game follow from the game's rules. Notice that facts that are normative or evaluative in this formal sense don't seem too far from the natural facts mentioned above—the thought that, say, the incorrectness of a certain move in a game is entirely grounded in facts about us and our practices seems quite natural, as is arguably that fact that a motorcycle's being

good-as-a-motorcycle is reducible to facts about the nature of motorcycles, or perhaps their function (itself understood in naturalistically respectable terms).

So it's important to note that not all normative facts are merely formally normative, and that indeed, moral facts aren't. (Well, this, like so much else, is controversial. But we're still in the process of explaining why non-naturalist realism is the default view, so for now, this will do.) Morality is not just a game that generates criteria of correctness—it is *the right* game, a game whose correctness conditions you can't escape by refusing to play it. Moral evaluation is not just the evaluation of something-qua-something, of how good something is *as a motorcycle*, but of how good it is, period. This is why sometimes something like “This is not a bad motorcycle; it is a good motorcycle-shaped memorial” can be a good defense (against the accusation that its engine doesn't run) and requires re-evaluation, but “This is not a bad trait of character; it is a good envious-trait-of-character” is not. The normativity that morality seems to possess, and anyway the one we are most interested in, is *real* normativity, the one that connects with the genuine reasons that apply to us, or with what it makes sense to do, or with that to which we owe our allegiance. And the thought that facts and properties that are normative in this way, that are *full-bloodedly normative*, are really identical with (or grounded in, or constituted by) natural ones at the very least needs some serious positive support. The default position is to reject it.

In these ways, then, it seems like non-naturalist realism is the default view. Unless some powerful arguments can be presented against it, or (which amounts to the same thing) for some competing view, we should stick to the non-naturalist realist starting point. We can perhaps get some more support for this claim from the following sociological evidence: Philosophers defending alternative metaethical views often devote considerable effort to showing how they can, to an extent, cleverly accommodate the phenomena that, taken at face value, seem to support non-naturalist realism. Perhaps at the end of the day they succeed—and perhaps their views enjoy such weighty other advantages over non-naturalist realism that they should be preferred. But the fact that so much of the game for other views is to cleverly accommodate what non-naturalist realism straightforwardly accommodates at least supports the claim that it is indeed the default position.

SO WHY ISN'T EVERYONE ON BOARD?

If all is so good, why are so few metaethicists non-naturalist realists? (Though counting heads, of course, is not going to be easy; see Finlay 2010: 5; Bourget and Chalmers 2014.)

I think it is safe to say that what pushes many away from the default is the combined effect of two lines of thought. The first has already been mentioned—the phenomena mentioned in the previous section, and perhaps other important explananda for metaethics, can be explained, those rejecting non-naturalist realism think, even assuming the falsehood of non-naturalist realism, and replacing it with some other metaethical view. The second line of thought amounts to simply putting forward objections to non-naturalist realism. If any objection of this sort is devastating, of course, then we should all reject non-naturalist realism. But even if such objections are not devastating all by themselves, but merely exert a price—they make non-naturalist realism less good as a metaethical theory—this may suffice to justify departure from the default, especially if everything

non-naturalist realism can accommodate can also be accommodated by alternative views, views that are not as vulnerable to the relevant objections.

Let me, then, go *very* quickly through the most common objections to non-naturalist realism. Let me note, though, that this survey is offered with the usual provisos: *Everything* is controversial, including, in our context, how best to understand the relevant objections and how damaging they are to non-naturalist realism. And I try to compensate for the brevity with which I discuss these objections by referring to the other places in this volume where they are discussed in greater detail.

Many think that, as a general metaphysical view, or perhaps as a methodological one, *naturalism* is the way to go. Quite independently of making sense of moral discourse and practice, the thought goes, the only things that exist are natural things (perhaps the kind of things over which scientific theories quantify), or perhaps, as a methodological principle, we should treat the empirical sciences as the ultimate arbiters of what there is, or some such. If this is true in general, it is true when doing metaethics as well. A view that is inconsistent with such naturalism—as non-naturalist realism rather clearly is—loses plausibility for this very fact. The obvious line of response for the non-naturalist realist would be to reject metaphysical and methodological naturalism (e.g., Enoch 2011: 134). It is not clear how damaging this is, especially seeing that rejecting such naturalism need not involve rejecting *science*—merely the *exhaustiveness* of science, which may be an aspiration of many scientists but is not itself a scientific claim (for some discussion, see Peter Railton's chapter "Naturalistic Realism in Metaethics" and Daniel Nolan's chapter "Methodological Naturalism in Metaethics").

Now assume there are these moral facts. What exactly, in non-naturalist realism, is their relation to natural facts? We already know that they are supposed to be in some sense independent of them—not identical to them, not reducible to them, not entirely grounded in them. On the other hand, moral facts can't be *entirely* independent of natural facts. Certainly, not all of them can—perhaps, for instance, *fundamental* or *basic* moral facts (like that pain is pro tanto bad, or that humiliation is pro tanto wrong) are independent of natural facts, but more *derivative* moral facts (like that kicking that cat is wrong, or that spitting in your direction is wrong) clearly depend on natural facts (that kicking the cat will cause it pain, or that spitting in this context will amount to humiliation). So the non-naturalist may need something like a distinction between basic and derivative moral facts, or perhaps between different ways of *grounding* moral facts—the way in which the wrongness of kicking the cat is *normatively* grounded in its feeling pain, which the non-naturalist allows, and the way in which some naturalists seek to *metaphysically* ground moral facts in natural ones, which the non-naturalist rejects (see, for instance, Fine 2002, and Gideon Rosen's chapter "Metaphysical Relations in Metaethics"). Furthermore, and relatedly, it seems like a fairly robust intuition that if two actions are alike in all natural properties, it can't be that only one of them is wrong. Surely if, say, one action is right and another wrong, it must be that the former causes less pain than the latter, or that the latter amounts to a lie-telling and former does not, or some such; furthermore, it seems that the difference in moral status between the actions is there *virtue* of these non-moral differences between them. Moral properties, in other words, *supervene* on natural ones. But such supervenience seems to call for explanation, and it's not clear that the non-naturalist has available to her a satisfactory explanation (McPherson 2012 and forthcoming are especially helpful presentations of the challenge). Non-naturalists attempt to respond

by offering such explanations (Shafer-Landau 2003: 80–97; Wedgwood 2007: 207–20, Enoch 2011: 140–50; Leary forthcoming). Interestingly, denying the explanandum—that is, denying supervenience—is not, as far as I know, a dialectical move that has been pursued in detail by non-naturalists (though see, for instance, Sturgeon 2007 and Rosen’s manuscript). Another related line of response is to attempt a better understanding of the grounding relation and, in particular, the ways in which, according to non-naturalist realism, normative properties and facts are, and the ways that they are not, grounded in natural ones (for some relevant discussion, see Gideon Rosen’s chapter “Metaphysical Relations in Metaethics” and Pekka Väyrynen’s chapter “The Supervenience Challenge to Non-Naturalism”).

Putting metaphysics to one side now, how if at all can we know anything about these purported moral facts? How can we have *epistemic access* to them? If they are abstract, outside of space-time, causally inert, utterly independent of human responses and attitudes—if, as we might say, they sit all the way out there in Plato’s Heaven—how can our beliefs about them be justified, or indeed amount to knowledge? If there is no way of answering this question, the non-naturalist realist can have his metaphysics, but at the price of the most radical of metaethical skepticisms—a Pyrrhic victory if there ever was one. Non-naturalists typically respond by placing pressure on the idea of epistemic access—it is not entirely clear, after all, what exactly it means—and placing the discussion in the context of wider epistemological issues (like whether justification and knowledge require a causal relation to the things known) (Shafer-Landau 2003: chapters 10–12; Wedgwood 2007: chapter 10), and “companions-in-guilt” arguments purporting to show that in this epistemological respect morality does not do worse than mathematics, and perhaps the a priori in general) (for a general discussion of companions-in-guilt arguments, see Lillehammer 2007). Much of the recent discussion of this epistemic challenge to non-naturalist realism (and to an extent, other forms of realism as well) has taken the shape of evolutionary debunking arguments—arguments based on the purported observation that a plausible scientific account of how we came to make the moral judgments we do in fact make, together with realist assumptions, do not leave room for any plausible explanation of the reliability of those judgments, whose epistemic justification is thereby defeated (Street 2006; Joyce 2006: chapter 6; Enoch 2011: chapter 7). The discussion of this challenge is very much alive (Vavova 2015; see also Joshua Schechter’s chapter “Explanatory Challenges in Metaethics”).

You may think, though, that by asking about the epistemic credentials of our beliefs about moral properties, objects, and facts, already too much has been granted to the non-naturalist realist. For if the moral properties, say, float all the way out there in Plato’s Heaven, it’s not clear how we can even have beliefs *about them* at all. In virtue of what, in other words, does our word “good” latch onto the property *goodness* on the Platonic shelf of properties rather than onto some other property there, or nothing at all? A story seems to be called for, and the most natural stories to tell (stories we tell in other contexts, perhaps in causal terms) don’t seem to be available to the non-naturalist realist. This *meta-semantic* challenge has not received as much attention from non-naturalist realists as perhaps it should. The natural way to proceed would be, again, to place it in the more general meta-semantic context, perhaps specifically that applying to other a priori domains (McPherson 2013; see also Laura Schroeter and François Schroeter’s chapter “Metasemantics and Metaethics”).

Putting now both metaphysical worries and worries about access (epistemic and semantic) to one side, a host of *motivational* worries face non-naturalist realism. When one pronounces a moral judgment (“Bullfighting is wrong!”), and perhaps when such a judgment is true of one (if it’s true, say, that I ought to help her), one’s motivations seem to be engaged, perhaps necessarily engaged, in ways in which they are not (necessarily, or even typically) engaged when one makes empirical and mathematical judgments (like that bullfighting is common in Spain, or that there is no largest prime). The precise nature of this relation to motivations is of course controversial, and distinctions will have to be drawn here (see David Faraci and Tristram McPherson’s chapter “Ethical Judgment and Motivation” and Errol Lord and David Plunkett’s chapter “Reasons Internalism”). And this is how the discussion has been unfolding—a strong relation between normativity and motivation is asserted (say—borrowing something from Williams (1980) and changing it a bit—it can’t be the case that you are morally required to phi, unless there is a sound deliberative route leading from your current motivational set to your phi-ing); it is then asserted that non-naturalists cannot accommodate this relation, and non-naturalists respond by attempting to accommodate it or by rejecting it as offering too strong a relation between normativity and motivation (for instance, Svavarsdóttir 1999; Enoch 2011: chapter 9). Relatedly, the point is sometimes made (Korsgaard 1996; Bedke 2014) that if moral properties and facts are utterly independent of us and our concerns, it is not clear why we should care about them—why should we allow, the thought seems to be, a major role in our life to those distant, detached things on the Platonic shelf? The (non-naturalist) realist, it is thus sometimes suggested, seems especially unhelpful in responding to the age-old why-be-moral challenge. Unlike with other challenges, where the main line for non-naturalist realists is to attempt to respond to them head on, with regard to this challenge its very intelligibility is often questioned (Parfit 2011 [Vol. II]: 419–25; Enoch 2011: 242–47; Chappell’s manuscript).

Lastly, many are impressed with *moral disagreement*—its scope, its persistence, its unmanageability (perhaps). Such disagreement, many think, though perhaps not incompatible with non-naturalist realism, is at least not very friendly to it. Perhaps, for instance, while alternative metaethical theories can readily explain such disagreement, non-naturalist realism cannot (or not as well, anyway) (for some discussion, see Gunnar Björnsson’s chapter “The Significance of Ethical Disagreement for Theories of Ethical Thought and Talk”). Or perhaps moral disagreement does not threaten the metaphysical status of moral facts directly, but rather their epistemological status—perhaps, in other words, in the face of such disagreement, and assuming non-naturalist realism, we should all decrease our confidence in our moral views, perhaps to the point of suspension of judgment (Wedgwood 2010; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006; and Dustin Locke’s chapter “The Epistemic Significance of Moral Disagreement”). Here too, then, there is a family of concerns rather than one clear challenge to non-naturalist realism, and non-naturalists can respond by distinguishing between them, offering explanations consistent with their theory of the phenomena in the vicinity of disagreement that needs explaining, and denying some other purported explananda (for instance, Enoch 2011: chapter 8, and the references therein).

Non-naturalist realists, then, have their work cut out for them. It is quite possible that, its intuitive advantages notwithstanding, under the combined pressure of these (or other) objections, the view should be rejected. On the other hand, perhaps these objections can,

at least to an extent, be adequately dealt with. Even if they can, perhaps some readers will still respond to assertions of non-naturalist realism with a kind of an incredulous stare (Lewis 1986: 133): “Are you seriously suggesting,” someone may ask, “that moral properties and facts inhabit the cosmos in something like the way that stars and electrons do? *Seriously?*” As Lewis himself noted, though (in a context in which an incredulous stare seems more called for), it is hard to know how to respond to an incredulous stare. Perhaps not much more can at this point be done than point out the many shortcomings of other, competing views; the success (if it is a success) of non-naturalism in dealing with more specific, manageable objections; its success in accommodating many deep, pre-theoretical intuitions; and perhaps also the fact that moral non-naturalism is not much more spooky than other, respectable views (like perhaps Platonism in the philosophy of mathematics, or indeed any other view that takes the a priori seriously).

WAIT, WHAT EXACTLY IS THE VIEW?

Still, in recent years, an altogether different family of worries has become just as prominent—not so much about non-naturalist realism directly, but about the debate of which it is a part. For it has become increasingly unclear what precisely the difference is between non-naturalist realism and some alternative metaethical views, and as a result also what precisely the view *is*.

A part of the problem is more general—it’s no longer clear what the distinction between realism (naturalist or non-) and antirealism comes to. One major issue here has been the growingly popular minimalist conceptions of truth and related concepts. Such conceptions of truth contrast with attempts to find a metaphysically substantive conception of truth, such as truth as correspondence to independent facts (with “correspondence” substantively understood), or as that on which we will all converge at the end of inquiry, or some such. If there’s no metaphysical substance to truth, if there’s no more substance to truth than, roughly, the many instances of the truth schema (“It’s true that so-and-so if and only if so-and-so”), then *of course* moral judgments are truth-apt (It’s true that bullfighting is wrong if and only if bullfighting is wrong; and, as many antirealists will be happy to agree, bullfighting *is* wrong; so it’s true that bullfighting is wrong). If so, the realism–anti-realism debate cannot be about truth. And if similarly minimalist lines can be pushed on such related concepts as *representation*, *correspondence*, *property*, *refer to*, *fact*, *proposition*, then these too can’t be what the realism–anti-realism divide is about (Dreier 2004). Now, so far this is a problem for *everyone* in metaethics—we thought we knew what we were arguing about, but now things don’t seem as clear anymore. But you may think (as do quasi-realists; see Terence Cuneo’s chapter “Quasi-realism”) that this is *especially* a problem for non-naturalist realism, because such *creeping minimalism* (again, see Dreier 2004) purportedly undermines its purported advantages (pretty much all other views can easily now accommodate those), without commitment to any extra metaphysical (or even rhetorical) baggage; or, perhaps, because such minimalism prevents the non-naturalist from even explaining what this extra baggage *is*. Non-naturalists respond as you may expect them to—by trying to emphasize, perhaps together with other realists, differences that remain between the different metaethical views, and by insisting that if the differences are now gone, what happened was a convergence on realism, not

something else (Johnston 1989: 141). And of course, another option is to reject minimalism as a general view of *truth*, *representation*, *property*, *fact*, and the rest, perhaps even on the strength of the conviction that something big and important *is* at stake in the realism–antirealism debates.

Creeping minimalism, as I just said, is at the very least a problem for all realists, and may be a problem for all metaethicists. But there are also problems in the vicinity here that are unique to non-naturalist realism. One starts very close to home—a number of metaethicists who seem to be the non-naturalist’s closest allies (in accepting that truth and response independence straightforwardly apply to moral judgments, and in rejecting something like a naturalist reduction) but who nonetheless insist on their view not being ontologically heavy in any way. Thus, Dworkin (1996) ridicules those who think that a commitment to this kind of realism entails a commitment to something like moral particles—“morons”—and Parfit (2011 [Vol. II]: 480–83), while insisting that moral facts exist, insists that they exist in “a non-ontological sense.” Perhaps motivating such views is the feeling that more metaphysical concerns are—to the extent that they are even coherent—somehow irrelevant when it comes to our first-order moral concerns, and perhaps by implication, to our metaethical ones as well. Under the pressure of such so-called quietist views, it again becomes unclear what the distinctive non-naturalist realist claims exactly are. (It also becomes unclear, though ultimately perhaps not that interesting, whether such quietists should be classified as non-naturalist realists at all.) Perhaps the best way to view the discussion of quietism here is as a part of a much bigger philosophical discussion—the one now often called “metametaphysics” (Chalmers et al. 2009)—of what it is that is in dispute in seemingly ontological disputes. Most metaethical quietists don’t engage in this general discussion, and it’s unclear how successful they are when they do (see Scanlon 2014; Enoch and McPherson forthcoming; and Doug Kremm and Karl Schafer’s chapter “Metaethical Quietism”). And to many of us, of course, it seems that the best, most intellectually honest way for the non-naturalist to proceed is to acknowledge the full, non-deflated ontological commitments of the view, and defend them (McPherson 2011; Enoch 2011: 121–33; Enoch and McPherson forthcoming).

Lastly, the initial characterization of non-naturalist realism above relied on an understanding of the *natural*. But the *natural* is anything but a philosophically transparent idea. And different understanding of what it takes, say, for a property to be natural will have different implications for the understanding of the distinction between naturalist and non-naturalist realism. Different suggestions come up in the literature. If natural properties are understood, for instance, as *causally effective*, then the non-naturalist is committed to the moral facts and properties being causally inert. And while this is a commitment some non-naturalists are happy to accept, this may not be true of all of them (see, for instance, Oddie 2005). Often (e.g., Copp 2003) the natural is characterized in epistemic terms—those things are natural that can be known in, roughly, an empirical way—but the distinction we were after was metaphysical rather than epistemic, so it’s not clear that this helps. There is even a suggestion to understand the natural negatively, as, roughly, the non-normative (Ridge 2007). But it’s not clear that such a characterization can help in meaningfully delineating the naturalist from the non-naturalist realists (and see Cuneo 2007b for a suggestion to understand the natural in more methodological terms). When characterizing the natural above, I spoke (following Sturgeon 2007: 64) rather loosely about the kind of properties (etc.) the empirical sciences quantify over,

and perhaps this was a good start. But I don't want to pretend that we should be happy with this way of understanding the naturalist–non-naturalist divide. It's unclear what exactly the empirical sciences include (economics? sociology?), why they get the kind of metaphysical status that this way of understanding naturalism seems to give them, or, of course, how properties (and the like) are best divided into kinds. (For another suggestion of characterizing the natural–non-natural divide, see McPherson 2015.)

ARGUMENTS

Even if non-naturalist realism, somewhat naïvely understood, is the default position, then, this should not give us non-naturalists too much confidence. There are initially powerful objections to the view. And as if it's not bad enough, a naïve characterization of the view may no longer suffice, as challenges have been raised to the naïve understanding of what is at stake.

So what the non-naturalist needs, it seems, is *positive arguments*. In the dialectical situation just described, the initial plausibility of the view only goes so far. What more by way of positive argument can be offered for the view? Notice that if we had a better understanding of the arguments for the view—especially if they are *philosophically sincere*, in the sense of capturing the relevant underlying concerns that push people in non-naturalist realist directions (Enoch 2011: 9–10)—perhaps we could then revisit also worries about what the view is: The view is that view, whatever exactly its details, that best responds to those underlying concerns.

By far the most historically influential argument for something in the vicinity of non-naturalist realism is Moore's *Open Question Argument* (Moore 1903: Section 13). The argument—originally intended as an objection to some naturalist reductions, not as a positive argument for non-naturalist realism—notes how it is implausible to attribute sameness of meaning to moral and natural words or locutions. The thought that the good just is what we desire to desire, for instance, if understood as the thought that “good” and “what we desire to desire” are synonymous, is highly implausible. For if it were true, the question “Sure, I see that that's what we desire to desire, but is it good?” would sound silly, like “Sure, I see that he's a 30-year-old man who has never been married, but is he a bachelor?” But the two questions sound very different—the latter sounds *closed*, so that only someone failing to master some of the relevant concepts may genuinely ask it, but the former sounds genuinely open. Moore took this to refute this naturalist reduction—and insisted (with very little further discussion) that a similar refutation will apply to any other naturalist reduction.

Everyone knows that the Open Question Argument fails. For one thing, at most it refutes *analytic* or *a priori* naturalist reductions. Naturalists who put forward an identity relation between moral and natural properties (but not moral and natural concepts) are entirely off the hook. On such a view, the openness of Moore's question is not more surprising than the openness (perhaps several centuries ago) of the question “I see there's water in the cup, but is there H₂O there?” On this suggestion, the openness of a question is explained by the absence of an *a priori identity* statement closing it, not necessarily by the absence of *any* identity statement closing it. Even just focusing now on analytic or a priori naturalist views, Moore is wrong to assume that all true analyses are transparent in

the same way that “All never-married men are bachelors” presumably is. And it’s always possible that even if Moore was right that the questions relevant to many naturalist reductions are open in this way, a sufficiently clever naturalist reduction will close the question—perhaps the problem is not with naturalist reductions in general, but rather with the specific reductions we have thus far been able to come up with. Interestingly, though, despite the argument’s many flaws, many metaethicists feel that Moore was nonetheless onto something here—perhaps something like the feeling that any naturalist reduction loses the very normativity it was meant to capture (see Rosati 1995), or, as I like to put it (Enoch 2011: 107–108), the intuition that normative facts and natural ones are just too different to make anything like a reduction remotely plausible.

Contemporary non-naturalist realists have not been as prolific in putting forward positive arguments for the view as they have been in responding to objections to it, and in pointing out the flaws in competing views (this seems true of Huemer 2006 and of Shafer-Landau 2003; see Korsgaard’s [2006: 41] complaint against Nagel). Still, some such positive arguments can now be found in the literature. One such argument—due to Terence Cuneo 2007a—relies on promising analogies with non-naturalist realism regarding *epistemic* norms, properties, and facts. Of course, such arguments by analogy put pressure on whether non-naturalist realism is the view to accept about epistemology, and the need for positive arguments may resurface there.

In previous work (2011: chapters 2–4) I offered two arguments in support of non-naturalist realism. One argument—intended to establish something in the vicinity of the objectivity of morality, not exactly going all the way to non-naturalist realism—claims that with the help of some plausible auxiliary moral premises, different metaethical views have different *first-order, moral* implications. If so, the plausibility of the first-order implications of realism (and the implausibility of the implications of some competing views) scores some plausibility points for realism. The specific implication I was concerned with was the fact that in cases of moral disagreement and conflict the response morally called for seems very different from the kind of impartial response often morally required in cases of conflicts stemming merely from conflicting interests or preferences. This difference, I argue, is best explained by the truth of some realist metaethical view. But regardless of the details of this argument, the thought that perhaps we can gain traction on some metaethical debates by considering their first-order implications seems worth pursuing (if, that is, *there are* such implications, which is itself a controversial matter—see Enoch 2011: 41–49).

Another positive argument for non-naturalist realism (though about the normative, not necessarily about morality directly) proceeds by analogy with indispensability arguments in the philosophy of mathematics. There, that quantifying over some entities is indispensable to our best explanatory theories is often taken to be a good reason to believe that they exist. And it’s not clear, of course, whether moral properties (and the like)—non-natural or otherwise—play an indispensable role in any respectable explanations (Harman 1977: chapter 1). But perhaps normative properties (and facts, and truths, and objects) do play an indispensable role in some other, non-explanatory project. I argue that they play such a role in the *deliberative* project—the project, roughly, of deciding what to do by coming up with answers to questions like what I have most reason to do—and that this kind of role is on a par with explanatory indispensability when it comes to conferring respectability on ontological commitments (for some critical discussion, see McPherson and Plunkett [2015]).

At the end of the day, then, how confident should we be in non-naturalist realism? It won't surprise you that the jury is still out. But perhaps we can get back to where we started. Non-naturalist realism is the default position. If other views are sufficiently convincing, or if the objections to non-naturalist realism are, then we should look elsewhere. But I still think—and hope—that non-naturalist realism is a major contender in metaethics.

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