Toward Fin de siecle Ethics: Some Trends

Stephen Darwall; Allan Gibbard; Peter Railton

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1. SETTING THE STAGE

PRINCIPIA'S REVENGE

The *Philosophical Review* is a century old; so too—nearly enough—is a certain controversy in moral philosophy, a controversy initiated by G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*.[1] Both centenarians are still full of life. This we celebrate without reserve in the case of the *Review*; should we be equally happy about the continuing vitality of the other?

After all, the controversy began with Moore's charge that previous moral philosophy had been disfigured by a fallacy—the fallacy of defining Good in either naturalistic or metaphysical terms. Yet it has been known for the last fifty years that Moore discovered no *fallacy* at all. Moreover, Moore's accident-prone deployment of his famous "open question argument" in defending his claims made appeal to a now defunct intuitionistic Platonism, and involved assumptions about the transparency of concepts and obviousness of analytic truth that were seen (eventually, by Moore himself) to lead inescapably to the "paradox of analysis." To grant Moore all of the resources he deploys or assumes in his official presentation of the open question argument would suffice to bring the whole enterprise of conceptual analysis to a standstill, and show nothing about Good in particular.[2] One contemporary philosopher concludes

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[1] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903.
[2] John Maynard Keynes is said to have thought Moore's *Principia* "better than Plato," but subsequent writers have been more reserved. W. K. Frankena noted Moore's failure to locate a fallacy of any sort, in "The Naturalistic Fallacy," *Mind* 48 (1939): 464–77. Casimir Lewy points out some of Moore's missteps in stating the open question argument—but also tries to

that "as it stands the open question argument is invalid," since it purports to refute all definitional analyses of 'good', but relies upon an arbitrarily narrowed conception of philosophical or scientific definition.[3]

Why, then, isn't Moore's argument a mere period piece? However readily we now reject as antiquated his views in semantics and epistemology, it seems impossible to deny that Moore was on to something.

THE HEYDAY OF ANALYTIC METAETHICS

Moore had discovered not a proof of a fallacy, but rather an argumentive device that implicitly but effectively brings to the fore certain characteristic features of 'good'—and of other normative vocabulary—that seem to stand in the way of our accepting any known naturalistic or metaphysical definition as unquestionably right, as definitions, at least when fully understood, seemingly should be. Dissociated from Moorean thought experiments that call Platonic concepts before the mind's eye, the open question argument can do its job case by case. One asks of any purported account identifying some descriptive property or state P as the meaning of 'good' whether on careful reflection we do not in fact find that we understand the question, "*Is P* really good?" If this question is intelligible—even, it seems, to those who hold that having or being P is a good thing (perhaps the only good thing) and who are moved to give nonlinguistic reasons in defense of a positive answer to the question—then, absent some further story, P could hardly just be what we *mean* by 'good'. If this argumentive device is to succeed conclusively, we must be utterly convinced that

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put the argument aright—in "G. E. Moore on the Naturalistic Fallacy," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 50 (1964): 251–62. Pressed by critics later in life to state his criteria of analysis, Moore laid down conditions that left him unable to identify any successful analyses. An open question argument that relies upon these conditions establishes an 'is'/'ought' gap only in the sense that it also establishes a 'brother'/'male sibling' gap. See his "Reply to My Critics," in *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1942), 660–66.

[3]See Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19–20. He remarks, "There are . . . various kinds of definitions and the open question argument is not relevant to most of them" (19).

the intelligibility of this question does not arise from ignorance of logical implication, or of factual or linguistic information. Here is where the qualification 'absent some futher story' comes into play: How can one claim utter conviction that no logical, factual, or linguistic oversight is involved without simply begging the question?

The best response comes in two parts. First, one should not claim utter conviction, but merely observe that the open question argument *is* compelling for otherwise competent, reflective speakers of English, who appear to have no difficulty imagining what it would be like to dispute whether *P* is good.

Second, one should articulate a philosophical explanation of why this might be so. Here is one such explanation. Attributions of goodness appear to have a conceptual link with the guidance of action, a link exploited whenever we gloss the open question 'Is *P* really good?' as 'Is it clear that, other things equal, we really ought to, or must, devote ourselves to bringing about *P*?' Our confidence that the openness of the open question does not depend upon any error or oversight may stem from our seeming ability to imagine, for any naturalistic property *R*, clear-headed beings who would fail to find appropriate reason or motive to action in the mere fact that *R* obtains (or is seen to be in the offing). Given this imaginative possibility, it has not been *logically* secured that *P* is action-guiding (even if, as a matter of fact, we all do find *R* psychologically compelling).[4] And this absence of a logical or conceptual link to action shows us exactly where there is room to ask, intelligibly, whether *R* really is good.

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[4]By contrast, Harman claims that if certain tendencies of approval and disapproval were "wired in" in humans, along with associated "automatic" action-tendencies, then "the open question argument fails" (ibid., 29). Noncognitivists have assumed that the connection must be logically rather than nomologically secured—a matter of meaning, not of fact. Such an assumption rests at bottom on the possibility of drawing an interesting analytic/synthetic distinction. As Quine writes:

> My rejection of the analyticity notion just means drawing no line between what goes into the mere understanding of the sentences of a language and what else the community sees eye-to-eye on. ("Epistemology Naturalized," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1969], 86)

For more discussion, see below, and section 4.

This explanation would permit us to see why the open question argument, which has bulked so large in ethics, has had little if any explicitly recognized influence in other areas of philosophy in which reductive naturalistic accounts have been proposed—for these areas have (perhaps wrongly) not been thought to have this conceptual tie to action-guidingness.[5] Moreover, this explanation would permit us to understand how the argument could have come to be seen as convincing against the entire range of reductive naturalisms, not just those considered to date and not just those narrowly definitional. Finally, this explanation would enable us to understand how the argument came to bite the hand that first fed it, and, eventually, to count Intuitionism among its victims. For, it appears no easier to see how an appropriate link to motivation or action could be logically secured if we were to substitute—in the conditional considered in the previous paragraph—'sui generis, simple, nonnatural property Q' for 'naturalistic property R'. The response of Prichard, namely, that seeing the relevant nonnatural property just is seeing a binding obligation to act, with no further explanation or incentive, merely deepens the mystery of the nature of this alleged property and what it would be like to see it clearly or find it normative.[6]

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[5] This impression may of course be in error. Some recent work has emphasized the normativity of epistemic and semantic concepts. Predictably, this has in turn led to a questioning of the very possibility of naturalistic reductions of these concepts as well. See, for example, Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Paul Boghossian, "The Rule-Following Considerations," *Mind* 98 (1989): 507–49; and Jaegwon Kim, "What is 'Naturalized Epistemology'?" *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988): 381–405. Whether there is the basis for a nonnaturalistic approach to meaning, say, that avoids the difficulties of Platonism that naturalism was conceived in order to circumvent (compare the discussion of Intuitionism that follows) remains to be seen.

[6] H. A. Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest On A Mistake?" *Mind* 21 (1912): 21–37. For a similar criticism, see P. H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1954), 41:

> A new world is revealed for our inspection [by "rational intuition" of nonnatural properties] . . . it is mapped and described in elaborate detail. No doubt it is all very interesting. If I happen to have a thirst for knowledge, I shall read on. . . . But what if I am not interested? Why should I do anything about these newly-revealed objects?

Moreover, as Nowell-Smith goes on to claim and as Prichard would agree, even discovering a (mere) *interest* in these properties would not show they could constitute *moral obligations*.

Wittgenstein, for one, could see something else quite clearly—"as it were in a flash of light," he says—namely, that "no description that I can think of would do to describe what I mean by absolute value, [and] I would reject every significant description anybody could suggest, *ab initio*, on the [very] ground of its significance."[7] Description, he concludes, could not be the essential semantic role of a vocabulary with action-guidingness logically built into it.[8]

Yet moral discourse unquestionably has the surface form of a descriptive, property-attributing language. One might at this point be tempted toward the conclusion that moral discourse therefore is systematically misleading. But a potentially more illuminating and less revisionist alternative suggests itself. If we interpret sincere acceptance of a moral judgment as the (noncognitive) expression of an attitude of categorical endorsement, we can dispense with the need to find some indescribable property that moral judgments descry. Categorical endorsement *is* logically tied to the action-tendencies or normative posture of the person making the judgment—categorical endorsement being a *pro-attitude* toward the object of assessment. This account of what is going on in moral judgment thus is not vulnerable to the open question argument as stated above, and, indeed, can take advantage of whatever force this argument may have to help eliminate competitors.

Thus we are led to see noncognitivism as the real historical beneficiary of the open question argument. Of course, it will be able fully to enjoy this benefit only if a noncognitivist reconstruction is possible for the seemingly cognitive aspects of moral discourse, including the phenomena of moral disagreement, and this has proved no easy task. If such reconstruction is possible, then noncognitivism will afford a compact explanation of why such seemingly cognitive disagreement actually proves so resistant (in basic cases) to cognitive—that is, deductive or inductive—resolution.[9]

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[7]L. Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 11. We are indebted to David Wiggins for drawing our attention to Wittgenstein's "Lecture" as a *locus classicus* for the view of normativity under discussion here, as well as to Casimir Lewy's discussion of Moore, cited in note 2, above.

[8]See also Moore's "Reply to My Critics," 590–91.

[9]Cf. Ayer's defense of emotivism on grounds of the impossibility of resolving basic value conflicts, and also Stevenson's view that it is a condition of any adequate account of goodness that it explain why questions of good and bad cannot be settled by science alone. See A. J. Ayer, *Language,*

Then too, an appropriately developed noncognitivism could afford considerable insight into the *dynamic social character* of moral discourse.[10] In a social setting we find ourselves with differences in interest and opinion, but also with a need for common principles and practices. Thus we need our subjective expressions on matters of feeling and conduct to have an "objective purport," so that they can be used to apply pressure on others (and even on oneself) to draw toward consensus and compliance even in the presence of conflicting interests.[11]

The capacity of noncognitivism to use the open question argument to its advantage while promising to render morality intelligible and defensible became better understood and more obvious as noncognitivism developed in the 1930s and 1940s. Eventually noncognitivism bested the competition and dominated the scene of analytic metaethics;[12] even Moore found himself half inclined to concede defeat.[13] Stasis—the less charitable would say *rigor mortis*—

Truth, and Logic (London: Gollancz, 1946), chap. 6 and C. L. Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," *Mind* 46 (1937): 14–31, especially 16–17.

[10]Stevenson in particular demonstrated the potential power of noncognitivism in this connection by stressing the persuasive, rather than merely expressive, role of the invocation of moral terminology. See his *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944) and *Facts and Values* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

[11]This objective purport need not be seen simply to be a matter of the (noncognitive) "magnetism" of the moral vocabulary; for it also is manifest in the (cognitive) considerations we take as persuasive in moral discussion, considerations which must be capable of supplying substantive answers to the questions people raise when wondering together about how it makes sense to act. Thus arise both a noncognitivist version of the supervenience of the moral upon the natural—understood as a normative constraint upon admissible moral argumentation rather than as a principle of metaphysics—and also the possibility that some *secondary* descriptive content might accrue to moral terms. In this way noncognitivism would be able to capture for moral discourse not only a conceptual link to action-guidingness, but also its *a priori* supervenience and its descriptive informativeness whenever relatively uncontroversial "standards" or evaluations are in play.

[12]A possible exception was the theory of value, where naturalism had greater staying power. See especially C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1947) and R. B. Perry, *Realms of Value* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954).

[13]"[I]f you ask me to which of these incompatible views [cognitivism vs. noncognitivism] I have the *stronger* inclination, I can only answer that I

set in. Why, then, do we say that the controversy Moore began is lively today?

THE GREAT EXPANSION

The 1950s witnessed increasing challenges to the adequacy or inevitability of noncognitivism. In England, a number of philosophers urged on broadly Wittgensteinian grounds that we question the picture of language they saw as underlying the noncognitivists' version of the fact/value distinction.[14] Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot began to force reconsideration of the idea that substantive, even naturalistic, content might be conceptually tied to moral evaluation.[15] At the same time, Peter Geach argued that such linguistic phenomena as embedding moral expressions within conditionals could not be handled by extant noncognitivist accounts, intensifying worries about whether a noncognitivist reconstruction of the cognitive grammar of moral discourse could succeed.[16]

In the United States, W. V. Quine had undermined confidence in the analytic/synthetic distinction, and, with Nelson Goodman, had urged a conception of the task of philosophy in which theory, metatheory, evidence, and inferential norm, or, alternatively, con-

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simply do not know, whether I am more strongly inclined to take the one than to take the other.—I think this is at least an honest statement of my present attitude," Moore wrote in his "Reply to My Critics" (545).

[14]Such work drew inspiration not from Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics" (first published in 1965) or related work, but from a general approach to meaning and use attributed to the later Wittgenstein, especially in *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (London: Macmillan, 1953). The "Lecture," and perhaps Stevenson's work as well, suggests that there need not be a natural affinity between a Wittgensteinian position and cognitivism. For discussion of the influence of postwar English moral philosophy on the United States, see W. K. Frankena's account of "The Latest Invasion from Britain," in R. M. Chisholm et al., *Philosophy: The Princeton Studies* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), 409–15.

[15]See G. E. M. Anscombe, "On Brute Facts," *Analysis* 18 (1958): 69–72, and "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1–19 (where Anscombe announces that "the 'naturalistic fallacy' . . . does not impress me, because I do not find accounts of it coherent" [3]); and Philippa Foot, "Moral Arguments," *Mind* 67 (1958): 502–13, and "Moral Beliefs," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59 (1958–59): 83–104.

[16]P. T. Geach, "Ascriptivism," *Philosophical Review* 69 (1960): 221–25.

tent and framework, were not sharply distinguished.[17] This re-
moved some of the pressure to identify either prescriptive or de-
scriptive content as "primary," permitting the relation between
them to depend upon general features of our going scheme and
circumstances rather than insisting that it be a "conceptual truth"
sustained come what may in every corner of logical space. The
"ideal observer" and "qualified attitude" theories of Roderick Firth
and Richard Brandt explored ways of capturing normativity within
a cognitivist account through the *idealization* of dispositions to re-
spond; in a somewhat similar vein, John Rawls suggested a "deci-
sion procedure" for ethics.[18] William Frankena identified the cen-
trality of internalism to debates in metaethics, and wondered aloud
whether the phenomena of moral discourse and experience really
support the sort of internalism that underwrote the move to non-
cognitivism.[19] Kurt Baier, Stephen Toulmin, and G. H. Von
Wright, among others, revived a conception of objectivity in ethics
based upon principles of practical reason.[20] Slowly, the landscape
of moral philosophy, which had become stark, even dessicated,
during the final years of the reign of analytic metaethics, was being
populated by a richer variety of views, many of which placed sub-
stantive and normative questions at the fore.

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[17]W. V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Philosophical Review* 60
(1951): 20–43 (see also H. Putnam, "The Analytic and the Synthetic," in
Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 3, ed. H. Feigl and G.
Maxwell [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962]); N. Good-
man, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
1955).

[18]See R. M. Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer," *Philo-
sophy and Phenomenological Research* 12 (1952): 317–45; R. B. Brandt, "The
Status of Empirical Assertion Theories in Ethics," *Mind* 61 (1952): 458–79,
and *Ethical Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1959); and J.
Rawls, "Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics," *Philosophical Review* 60
(1951): 177–97.

[19]W. K. Frankena, "Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philo-
sophy," in *Essays on Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. I. Melden (Seattle: University
of Washington Press, 1958). Frankena also noted a shift in moral philo-
sophy—within metaethics, increasing attention was being paid to the effort
to identify morality substantively—in "Recent Conceptions of Morality," in
Morality and the Language of Conduct, ed. H.-N. Castañeda and G. Nakhni-
kian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965).

[20]See K. Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University
Press, 1958); S. Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics* (Cambridge: Cam-
bridge University Press, 1961); and G. H. von Wright, *The Varieties of Good-
ness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

In the United States in particular, one such view became the reference point for all others, thanks in part to its systematic character and normative attractiveness: John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*, with its method of "reflective equilibrium."[21] The narrowly language-oriented agenda of analytic metaethics was fully displaced, not so much because of a refutation of, say, noncognitivism, but because of an uneasiness about the notions of "meaning" or "analytic truth," and because reflective equilibrium arguments, which tended to set aside metaethical questions, promised to shed much greater light on substantive—and in many cases socially pressing—moral questions. A period that might be called "the Great Expansion" had begun in ethics.

In the Great Expansion a sense of liberation came to ethics. Moral philosophers shed the obsessions of analytic metaethics, and saw—or thought they saw—ways of exploring normative morality as a cognitive domain, without a bad philosophical conscience. The result was an unprecedented pouring of philosophical effort and personnel into ethics, which in turn spread out into the most diverse issues and applications. There is no prospect of summarizing these events here, and no point in trying. What is of chief interest from the standpoint of the present essay is the way that the Great Expansion partly contributed to the contemporary revival of metaethics.

During the Great Expansion, moral intuitions (not Moorean insights into the Forms but substantive moral responses that strike us as compelling) flowed abundantly—occasionally urged on by a bit of pumping. Competing normative theories were "tested" dialectically against these intuitions in a procedure that appeared to be licensed by reflective equilibrium. Over time this reflective equilibrium widened to include a broad range of empirical and philosophical questions.[22] Moral philosophers and their critics grew in-

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[21]Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

[22]See, especially, Norman Daniels, "Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics," *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979): 256–82. The work of Derek Parfit greatly influenced the broadening of reflective equilibrium by displaying sharply the relevance of metaphysical questions about personal identity. See his "Later Selves and Moral Principles," in *Philosophy and Personal Relations*, ed. A. Montefiore (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), and also his *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon, 1984).

creasingly aware that a host of questions about the semantic, epi-
stemic, metaphysical, or practical status of morality arose in full
force about new normative methods and theories. Working in
somewhat different ways, Gilbert Harman and John Mackie made
these questions hard to ignore.[23]

Metaethics has come back to life, though the terms in which its
questions can be posed or answered have been changed by the
philosophy that has taken place since the heyday of analytic meta-
ethics. New forms of naturalism and nonnaturalism have once
again become competitive with noncognitivism, which itself has
been significantly refocused, for example, to encompass rationality
as well as ethics. And postwar work in game theory and rational
choice theory has opened the way to rethinking and sharpening
questions of practical justification, bringing them into a promi-
nence they had not enjoyed under analytic metaethics. Finally, as
we approach the *fin de siècle*, self-consciousness leaves little un-
touched; philosophy, including metaethics, has become reflective
both about the limitations of the notion of meaning and about the
point or prospects of philosophical inquiry itself.

CAVEAT LECTOR

In this way, as we see it, the stage has been set for the contem-
porary scene in moral philosophy. This scene is remarkably rich
and diverse, and our account of it is necessarily selective—emphasis
has been placed in order to create coherence. In what follows, we
will be concerned largely with (what unblushingly used to be called)
metaethical issues, sketching how these issues look, for now, from
our three separate but mutually regarding philosophical perspec-
tives.[24,25] We have tried to keep to issues we think important, but

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[23]G. Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, and J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing
Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977).

[24]Among the notable phenomena in contemporary ethics that will re-
ceive scant or no attention below are the greatly increased articulation and
range of normative ethics, including the emergence of a variety of Kan-
tianisms and virtue theories to challenge consequentialism, as well as the
proliferation of more sophisticated forms of consequentialism; the in-
crease in interest and scholarliness in the history of ethics; the dramatic
development of applied ethics; feminist critiques of contemporary moral
philosophy (but see section 3 for some discussion of the critique of "moral

we could not keep to all important issues. Our sketch is judgmental in other ways as well. Without judgment there would be neither plot nor moral; but judgmental sketches—cartoons are another example—make their points in part by exaggerating and oversimplifying.

2. THE REVIVAL OF METAETHICS

BACK TO BASICS

The method of reflective equilibrium accorded a cognitive and evidential status to moral intuitions or "considered moral judgments," particular and general alike. As the Great Expansion wore on, philosophers increasingly questioned whether this status was deserved.[26] At the same time, partly in response to developments in the philosophy of language, of science, and of mathematics, new conceptions (and new critiques) of objectivity and value were emerging on both sides of the Atlantic. These stirrings induced a widespread philosophical response and ushered in a genuinely new period in twentieth-century ethics, the vigorous revival of metaethics coincidentally with the emergence on several fronts of a criticism of the enterprise of moral theory itself.

Let us postpone discussion of the critique of moral theory for now (see section 3, below), and turn instead to the revival of "metaethics." We use this term broadly, not assuming that one can avoid normative commitments in doing metaethics and not restricting metaethics to the analysis of moral language; we include under "metaethics" studies of the justification and justifiability of ethical

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theory"); the growing literature on moral emotions and moral psychology generally, including (but not wholly overlapping with) recent phenomenological or "continental" studies in ethics; and approaches to metaethics based on blanket irrealism or antirealism.

[25]Various colleagues have tried—persistently, but with mixed results—to enlarge these perspectives, and we would like to express thanks to them, and to Richard B. Brandt and William K. Frankena in particular, for many and continuing conversations.

[26]Various philosophers, notably Brandt and Hare, had long raised questions of this kind. See R. B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) and R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). For a forceful expression of this concern, see Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*.

claims as well as their meaning, and also the metaphysics and epistemology of morals, and like matters.[27] Indeed, it would be misleading to attempt to draw a clear distinction between the revival of metaethics in recent years and what broad reflective equilibrium was becoming during the Great Expansion. For what does broad reflective equilibrium demand if not that we bring morality into some congruence with whatever else we hold in our going view of the world?

But what is our going view of the world? Perhaps most contemporary philosophers would agree that our going view treats empirical science as the paradigm of synthetic knowledge, and that an acceptable account of ethics must "place" it with respect to this paradigm, either by effecting some sort of methodological (and perhaps also substantive) assimilation (which might include a correction of some stereotypes of empirical science), or by establishing a convincing contrast.[28] Such "placement" would enable us to see how much of morality remains in order. Without some such placement, one might well ask what business philosophers had in pronouncing or systematizing normative moral judgments as if they were operating in an area of objective knowledge.[29] Even those philosophers who have insisted that ethics stands in no need of underpinnings in order to be an area of objective knowledge have

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[27]It remains true—and one might well ask how it could be otherwise—that an approach to the semantic interpretation of moral language typically plays a central role in current discussions of metaphysics and justification.

[28]The term "placing" is due to Simon Blackburn. See his "Errors and the Phenomenology of Value," in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), though we may not be using it in exactly the sense he intends.

[29]One cannot, of course, assume that 'objective knowledge' has any definite, well-understood and articulated meaning. Especially, one cannot simply assume that it amounts to "knowledge as attained in the empirical sciences," since that would beg the question straight off (as Thomas Nagel points out—see *The View From Nowhere* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1987], especially 144). We use the term 'objective' as an abbreviation for "of a kind consistent with a respectable resolution of a range of issues—epistemological, metaphysical, semantic—that in philosophical common sense are characteristically bundled together in the idea of objectivity."

One of the great hopes one might have for ethical philosophy is that it would shed some light on this characteristic bundle of issues and ideas. The development of ethical theory might, for example, permit one to see the possibility of philosophically respectable conceptions of objectivity

tended to *explain* how this could be so by giving a theoretical account of what morality is, and how this compares or contrasts with other areas of thought and practice.

The task set for the revival of metaethics thus has two elements. Put most simply, we can distinguish, first, the need for an account of what existing moral discourse and practice commits us to, and, second, the need for an answer as to how nearly these commitments can be made good. The second question implicitly involves a third, namely, If the commitments can be made good only to an approximation, how good an approximation is needed in order to vindicate moral discourse and practice (or some recognizable successor to them)? To understand the commitments of existing moral discourse and practice, then, is to separate apparent from real commitments (as, for example, the noncognitivist does when he distinguishes the superficially cognitive form of moral discourse from its underlying expressivist character; or, as the externalist does when he denies that "intrinsic reason giving" is a genuine feature of moral experience), and to determine which of the real commitments are most central to the nature and function of morality (as, for example, certain revisionists do when they claim their reforming account permits us to address all the practically significant questions that pre-revised morality was used to pose).

Understanding the commitments of ordinary moral or value discourse and practice would appear to involve accounts of at least the following: the semantics of the language of morals and value; the apparent metaphysical status of moral properties or values; the putative epistemology of morality or value theory; and the relation of morality or values to practical reasoning. These questions are interconnected, since the question of what, for example, values might *be* would appear to be inseparable from the question of how values are supposed to furnish practical reasons or engage us affectively or conatively. No account of the semantics or ontology of moral discourse could vindicate the objectivity of morality without showing either that a suitable relation between moral evaluation and action can be sustained, or that the appearance of such a spe-

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other than those modeled on mathematics or the empirical sciences. Or, one might find that a notion of objectivity developed for ethics could provide an unorthodox, but superior, understanding of objectivity in mathematics and science.

cial relation can be explained away without undue revisionism.[30] Similarly, any account of the epistemology of moral understanding and attribution must reckon with the practical character of morality, for example, by showing either that moral knowledge as explicated by the account would not run afoul of constraints against "esoteric morality," or that principled reasons can be given for weakening or rejecting such constraints.

We can distinguish two broad trends in contemporary moral theory depending upon how "the problem of placing ethics" is identified and faced, and the implications drawn. The first starts out from the idea that the "problem" is a product not of ethics, but of the wrong-headed notion of seeking to understand the objectivity of moral judgments on the model of the objectivity of empirical science. This approach depends upon finding some substantial contrast or discontinuity between facts (at least, facts of the paradigm sort treated of in natural science) and norms or values. Perhaps most philosophers find such a contrast *prima facie* plausible; more controversial, and thus the focus of the most urgent dialectical task of this first trend, is the claim that a *bona fide* form of objectivity[31] can be elaborated and defended for the ethical side

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[30]David Copp has coined the term 'confirmationalism' for the view (which he imputes to some naturalists) that one can rest a case for the objectivity of ethics simply on a showing that the instantiation of properties one identifies as moral can be confirmed by scientific means. See D. Copp, "Explanation and Justification in Ethics," *Ethics* 100 (1990): 237–58. In the end, confirmationalism is not a genuine alternative to the position urged in the text—without a suitable account of the normativity of these purported moral properties, one could not identify them as *moral* properties. Thus, confirmation of their existence as moral properties necessarily involves showing that they satisfy relevant constraints of normativity (whatever these might be). For further discussion, see P. Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 163–207, especially 188–89, 204–5.

[31]Compare Blackburn's discussion of "earning truth" in ethics (for example, in *Spreading the Word* [Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon, 1984]). At the heart of these issues is a concern about truth or correctness conditions. Clearly, it would *not* do to explain truth or correctness as a matter of "whatever now happens to strike us as right." What appears to be wanted is a notion of a domain of inquiry which not only *purports* to be apt for truth evaluation, but in which one can also distinguish between *improvement* and *mere change* of opinion, where improvement is suitably represented as in the direction of correctness (as opposed, say, to mere increase in internal coherence). One way of expressing this has been to ask whether the best explanation of our belief that p would attribute some

of this contrast. As we will see, philosophers advocating disconti-
nuity have attempted to carry out this task in various ways; perhaps
the principal distinction among them turns on whether moral judg-
ment is held to be cognitive (despite the discontinuity with a certain
paradigm of factual judgment) or noncognitive (and so objective in
some sense that does not involve aptness for—literal—truth eval-
uation).[32]

The second broad trend in response to "the problem of placing
ethics" accepts the challenge of showing that moral judgments are
factual in the paradigm sense afforded by empirical or theoretical

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appropriate role to p itself; this would then contrast with a "purely inter-
nal" or "merely subjective" explanation of belief that p. Part of the source
of vagueness here is that there is no agreed upon model of what it would
be for p to play an appropriate explanatory role. Harman, for example,
concludes that

> [t]here does not ever seem to be, even in practice, any point to explaining
> someone's moral observations by appeal to what is actually right or wrong, just
> or unjust, good or bad. (*The Nature of Morality*, 22)

(Unless, of course, we could reduce these evaluative terms to some explan-
atorily efficacious natural property or properties.) This causal-explanatory
test has been challenged as too narrow, since we may have good, nonsub-
jective *reasons* for belief that p even in areas where it seems implausible to
claim a causal-explanatory role for p, for example, in logic and mathemat-
ics. (Although some philosophers have thought that mathematics, too,
needs a causal-explanatory credential, and have claimed to find it in the
alleged "indispensability" of mathematics for science or in the reducibility
of those elements of mathematics genuinely needed for science, and the
eliminability of the rest. Here we find various parallels to debates in
metaethics.)

[32]This distinction can appear to lose its interest under a minimalist
conception of truth. For example, if it suffices for a mode of discourse to
qualify as truth-evaluable that it bear all the characteristic syntactic fea-
tures of assertoric discourse, then moral discourse clearly qualifies even
before any interesting question of "placing" ethics has been raised, much
less settled. Still, though (minimal) truth would not need to be "earned" by
ethics, other important contrasts between ethics and, say, empirical science
or mathematics might remain. For there will be differences in the kinds of
features of the world that figure in the (minimal) *truth conditions* of sen-
tences in various domains, and differences, too, in the *methods* available for
establishing (minimal) truth and in the amount of *rational consensus* such
methods can bring about. These contrasts might shed a good deal of light
on the distinctive nature of ethics. Cf. Crispin Wright, "Realism: The
Contemporary Debate—Whither Now?" forthcoming in J. Haldane and C.
Wright, *Reality, Representation and Projection* (Oxford: Oxford University
Press).

judgments in the natural sciences.[33] Views in this second broad trend can also, in principle, be further divided as between cognitivist and noncognitivist. However, despite the readiness with which it may be admitted that assertoric scientific discourse typically involves some noncognitive elements, few, if any, philosophers seem to occupy the position that "paradigm factual" judgments are primarily noncognitive.[34] The chief dialectical task for those in this second trend, it would seem, is to show how a paradigm factual area of discourse could have—or could convincingly provide the appearance of—the peculiar characteristics of the discourse of value or morality, for example, normativity and contestability.

Let us begin our comparative investigation with the first-mentioned, and by far best-represented, trend: the view that there is a discontinuity between ethics and science. For brevity, call this view Discontinuity; its opposite, Continuity.

DISCONTINUITY

Nonnaturalistic intuitionists, such as Moore, famously insisted that morality is a genuine and objective area of inquiry, but that it

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[33]This may, but need not, be combined with the view that the scientific model is the *only* available model of objectivity or factuality. Moreover, such a position might involve challenging various aspects of orthodox views of science.

[34]*Noncognitive* here and elsewhere is contrasted not with *realist* but with *cognitivist*. Irrealist and antirealist accounts of scientific language that nonetheless treat such language as apt for literal truth evaluation thus are placed on the cognitivist side. Instrumentalism, by contrast, is both antirealist and a form of noncognitivism about scientific language. But few instrumentalists have adopted this attitude toward science as a whole, preferring instead to distinguish (allegedly instrumental) theoretical language from (paradigm factual) observation language. Similarly, those philosophers who have urged that the contrast between "scientific law" and "accidental generalization" be understood along noncognitivist lines (e.g., as involving a special kind of commitment in the case of laws; cf. A. J. Ayer, "What is a Law of Nature?" *Revue internationale de philosophie* 36 [1956]), have characteristically held that (bare) empirical generalizations are to be interpreted as literally true or false. Thus, examples of continuity founded on a thoroughly noncognitive interpretation of both scientific and ethical language are scarce. (Dewey's "instrumentalism" about science, for example, is to be distinguished from logical empiricist varieties, and went along with a distinctive conception of cognitive inquiry and truth.)

is discontinuous in an important sense with empirical science. On the contemporary scene, the four most active forms of discontinuity are practical reasoning theories (as represented by, e.g., Thomas Nagel, Alan Donagan, Alan Gewirth, Stephen Darwall, and others); constructivism (e.g., John Rawls); noncognitivism (e.g., Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard); and (what we will call) sensibility theories (e.g., John McDowell and David Wiggins). Various other forms of discontinuity have their adherents, but we will somewhat arbitrarily confine our discussion to these four groups, discussing them in the order just given. Moreover, some who defend discontinuity *deny*—perhaps partly because of discontinuity—that ethics is in some special sense an area of genuine and objective inquiry; these views, too, will largely be passed over in what follows.[35] While we will discuss some of the particular advantages and disadvantages of various approaches to the question of objectivity, it should be clear in advance that the plausibility of any one of these positions is best assessed comparatively, in light of the philosophical or explanatory power of its competitors. Within the confines of the present project, we can attempt little more than to identify what strike us as areas of comparative strength and weakness, and therefore will say little about overall plausibility.

PRACTICAL REASONING THEORIES

One way of trying to take a broadly cognitivist view of ethics, while stressing discontinuities with science, has been to argue that what is needed in ethics is the idea of a valid reason *for acting*, as opposed to that of a reason for belief as it operates in theoretical disciplines. Unlike the intuitionisms of section 1, the rationalisms that have taken on new life have been those of *practical* reason. Objectivity, for such a view, consists not in accurate representation of an independent metaphysical order, but in universal demands

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[35]This sort of line is available to those who use noncognitivism as part of an argument that no claims to objective knowledge are part of ethics, or those error theorists who believe that such claims *are* part of ethics, but are systematically mistaken, for example, Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong.*

imposed within an agent's practical reasoning. By insisting, on the one hand, that morality must be grounded in practical rather than theoretical reason, these views have stressed a discontinuity with science. It is ethics' intrinsically practical character, its hold on us *as agents*, that explains the open question and, they say, marks ethics off from science.[36] By arguing, on the other hand, that there is such a thing as practical *reason* in which ethics can be grounded, they have tried to assure its objectivity. Recent versions of this approach can be distinguished into those with Hobbesian affinities and those that are broadly Kantian. The first group is typified by Baier and Gauthier, the second by Nagel, Korsgaard, Donagan, Darwall, and Gewirth.

Hobbesian views take the agent's interests or aims as the touchstone of practical reasons and attempt to argue that the standing of morals can be secured by the fact that moral reasons can be adequately based in these. For most recent Hobbesians, the idea is not that moral reasons are a kind of prudential reason. Rather, morality as a system of practical reasoning is in each person's interests; each gains by using it since this is necessary for mutually advantageous cooperation.

Recent versions of this view have their roots in ideas advanced by Kurt Baier in the late fifties, and they attempt to address a significant problem faced by Baier's early view.[37] While it may be in the interest of each that *all* accept interest-trumping, moral reasons, rather than face a mutually disadvantageous war of interests resulting from universal unconstrained prudence, it is not clear how this shows that any individual agent should reason morally rather than prudentially.[38] For each agent, *her* acting contrary to moral reasons will still be most in her interest, when morality and self-interest conflict.

One way of dealing with this problem has been to argue, as Baier has recently, that there is an independent constraint of *universal*

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[36]Thus, Nagel writes that "it is really an unrecognized assumption of internalism that underlies" Moore's open question argument (*The Possibility of Altruism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon, 1970], 8).

[37]Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View*.

[38]See, for example, David Gauthier, "Morality and Advantage," *Philosophical Review* 76 (1967): 460–75.

acceptability on any theory of practical reasons. No such theory can be correct if the grounds for holding it would be undermined by everyone's accepting it.[39] Since the consequences of everyone's being guided by unconstrained self-interest can hardly be accepted, the theory that practical reasons are exhausted by prudence violates this condition. But what exactly is the argument for thinking that a correct theory of practical reasons cannot be collectively self-defeating?[40]

A second Hobbesian approach, taken by Gauthier, is to hold that collective self-defeat does not rule out a theory of practical reasons, but to insist that individual self-defeat does. Practical reasons consist of whatever considerations inform the practical reasoning of an ideally rational agent, where an agent is ideally rational just in case she reasons in the way likeliest to achieve her interests. So long as agents have enough evidence about each others' motivations, and are unwilling to cooperate with others whom they believe to be disposed not to constrain self-interest when that is necessary for mutual advantage, it will be in the interest of each agent that *she* deliberate with interest-trumping, moral reasons.[41]

Individual or collective self-defeatingness may be grounds for doubting the advisability of acting on or accepting a theory in certain practical contexts, but don't we distinguish between the practical advisability of using or accepting a theory, on the one hand, and the conditions of its epistemic credibility or truth, on the other? Presumably, any cognitivist attempt to defend either of these conditions must show why this distinction, so central in our

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[39]Baier calls this a principle of *"universalizability"*; without this constraint, he says, "it might not be a good thing if everyone were perfectly rational. But that seems absurd." See Kurt Baier, "The Social Source of Reason," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 51 (1978): 719; see, also, K. Baier, "Moral Reasons and Reasons to be Moral," in *Value and Morals*, ed. A. I. Goldman and J. Kim (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: D. Reidel, 1978).

[40]The term is due to Derek Parfit, who uses it to raise this question in *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon, 1984), 87–92.

[41]"Reason and Maximization," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1975): 411–34; and *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon, 1986), 157–89.

thinking about theoretical reason, does not hold when it comes to theories of practical reason.[42] Practical reasoning theorists will insist that this is exactly what one should expect, and that it mirrors the difference between objectivity and knowledge in science and objectivity and knowledge in ethics.

But even if this challenge can be met, both Gauthier's and Baier's theories may face further problems, since they appear to combine a material condition for rationality (connection to the agent's interests) with a formal one (playing the right role in the agent's—or all agents'—deliberation). The rationales for these conditions have different philosophical affinities—Hobbesian versus Kantian, respectively—and perhaps for good reason.[43] And although combining them may suggest a powerful synthetic theory, it also loads rationality with conditions that appear to be, absent some demonstration to the contrary, potentially in conflict. What guarantees that there is available to us any policy for living that will satisfy both conditions at once? If there is none, then perhaps this calls into question one or the other of these conditions as constituents of our notion of rationality, or, then again, perhaps the notion of rationality pulls us in two incompatible directions, and affords morality a shaky foundation.[44]

This brings us to the other major practical reason view: Kantian rationalism. The first steps in this direction in recent years were taken by Nagel in *The Possibility of Altruism*. This work can be (and was) read as having both a modest and a more ambitious agenda. Nagel's more modest goal, suggested by his title, was to show how

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[42]This relates to the need to show that truth (or objectivity) can be combined with discontinuity. For a brief discussion of this point in connection with Kantian rationalism, see below.

[43]Thus Gauthier originally gave the following rationale for thinking a conception of practical rationality should be (individually) self-supporting: "A person who is unable to submit his conception of rationality to critical assessment, indeed to the critical assessment which must arise from the conception itself, is rational in only a restricted and mechanical sense. . . . [W]e must agree, with Kant, that in a deeper sense, reason is freedom" ("Reason and Maximization," 431).

[44]For further discussion of such worries in connection with Gauthier's views, see Stephen Darwall, "Rational Agent, Rational Act," *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1986): 33–57.

such "objective" (or, as he later called them, "agent-neutral") con-
siderations as "that acting would relieve *someone's* pain" can be gen-
uine reasons to act. A consideration can be rationally motivating,
he argued, even if the agent lacks any "unmotivated desire" to
explain her acting as the reason recommends. The only implicated
present desire may be attributable as a consequence of motivation,
and not necessary, therefore, to explain her being motivated by the
consideration itself. A person may be moved in this way, he argued,
by considering long-term interests. And if motivation at a distance
is possible with prudence, there is no reason why it cannot happen
with altruism as well. Altruistic (and other agent-neutral) consid-
erations may be no less *rationally* motivating.[45]

Nagel's more ambitious agenda was to show that practical rea-
soning is subject to a formal constraint which effectively requires
that *any* genuine reason to act be agent-neutral. Stressing what he
termed the "motivational content" of genuine practical judgments,
he argued that a kind of solipsism can be avoided only if an agent
is able to make the same practical judgment of himself from an
impersonal standpoint as he does from an egocentric point of view.
Accepting practical judgments from one's own point of view nor-
mally motivates, so, Nagel maintained, making the same judgment
of oneself from an impersonal standpoint should normally moti-
vate also. And this can be so only if the reasons that ground the
practical judgment are agent-neutral, formulable without a "free
agent variable." It follows that such considerations as that an act
will advance *his own* (or *the agent's*) interests cannot be ultimate
reasons for acting; at best they are incomplete specifications of
some underlying agent-neutral reason, for example, that the act
will advance someone's interests.

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[45]John McDowell later pursued this same line of thought in his critique
of Foot's claim that morality can be regarded as a "system of hypothetical
imperatives": "Why should the reasons which move people to virtuous
behavior not be similar to the reasons which move them to prudent be-
havior?" ("Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceed-
ings of the Aristotelian Society* 52 (suppl.) (1978): 15). If, as Nagel had argued
and Foot agreed, prudential considerations can cast a "favorable light" on
alternatives that does not derive from an unmotivated present desire, then
so might moral considerations. Their recommending force, for the agent,
will then apparently be independent of their relation to present desire.

Were this argument to work it would establish a purely formal conclusion: no ultimate reason for acting can have a free agent variable. By this test, some central moral considerations have the right form to be genuine reasons, while many of those which have been traditionally opposed to morality, for example, self-interest and instrumental rationality, do not. The latter considerations can be reasons only when subsumed under the former. On the other hand, as perhaps became apparent only later, much of common-sense morality is also not of the proper form. Such agent-relative considerations as that an act would keep *one's* promise or provide support for one's child could not be genuine reasons either.[46]

In the end, Nagel rejected the more ambitious agenda as well as the argument designed to secure it. The modest agenda, however, has had a continuing influence.[47] In his more recent writings Nagel has pressed it further, stressing both the phenomenology of moral and deliberative experience, and an autonomous agent's need to endorse her life from perspectives more objective than her own.[48]

Although in some ways Nagel's more ambitious agenda recalled Moorean intrinsic (if not nonnatural) value, it also drew from, and was identified with, the Kantian program in ethics. A number of other philosophers also sought resources in Kant's ideas to mount arguments with similar (some would say "vaulting") ambitions. Like Nagel, each argued that morality can be grounded in *practical* reason—in reason as it is employed in *agency*. Gewirth maintained, for example, that a claim to a right to goods critical to achieving his ends is intrinsic to the rational agent's perspective in *acting*, and that fundamental moral obligations follow from this claim.[49] In

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[46]Nagel discusses this phenomenon in *The View From Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 164–88. It is also discussed in Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon, 1982); and in Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*.

[47]For example, on Foot and McDowell.

[48]Especially in *The View From Nowhere*, 113–20, 134–37, 149–63.

[49]In *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Also, Alan Donagan took the view that, while no argument could establish it, insight into the essence of practical reason reveals that practical reasoning imposes a demand to respect rational agents as ends-in-themselves. If this was a kind of intuitionism, it was a sort different from the variety discussed in section 1; the fundamental moral norm is itself imposed by practical reason, and intuition reveals that fact (Donagan, *The Theory of*

addition to these efforts to bring Kantian rationalistic themes explicitly into contemporary debates, a flourishing scholarly literature on Kant's own writings also contributed substantially to our understanding of the resources available to a rationalism of practical reason.[50]

No doubt the attraction of Kantian theories is that they aim to give some account of the way morality appears to confront agents with objective, categorical demands, which, nonetheless, ultimately issue from deep within the moral agent. As theories of discontinuity, Kantian rationalisms insist that morality's normative grip must be understood practically, as imposed within the practical reasoning of moral agents. And as a version of cognitivism, they aim to ground a notion of validity through the idea of universal norms that practical reason prescribes. However, these twin aims make Kantian rationalism vulnerable from two directions. Noncognitivist discontinuity theorists will agree that any adequate account of morality must stress normative grip, but insist that, just for this reason, cognitivist aims must be abandoned. And cognitivists will second the Kantian rationalist's aim to secure genuine truth and knowledge for morality, but argue that successfully placing it in this way requires continuity, not discontinuity. If Kantian rationalism is attractive because it at least tries to combine these two aspects of a quite common view of morality, it may be unstable precisely because these two aspects resist being combined.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

The views we have been discussing treat morality as a demand of practical rationality as such. Moral reasons are reasons whatever

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Morality [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977]). Finally, Stephen Darwall argued that the normativity of practical reason is itself best understood through the idea of impartial endorsement of principle (Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983]).

[50]See especially Christine Korsgaard, "Morality as Freedom," in *Kant's Practical Philosophy Reconsidered*, ed. Y. Yovel (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 23–48; Henry Allison, "Morality and Freedom: Kant's Reciprocity Thesis," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 393–425; and Thomas E. Hill, Jr., "Kant's Argument for the Rationality of Moral Conduct," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1985): 3–23.

one's concerns and desires may be, and this result falls out of a theory of practical reason that does not presuppose morality—so these rationalists claim. Recently there has been another trend in moral theory, also claiming Kantian roots: the family of programs John Rawls labels "constructivism." Constructivism resembles Kantian rationalism on a number of counts: It claims a kind of objectivity for morality, and at the same time holds that this objectivity is sharply different from the objectivity of empirical judgments. It looks to the nature of practical choice as a basis for moral judgment. Still, in most of its versions, it avoids the daunting rationalist claim that morality is demanded by practical reason independently of even the broadest, deepest contingent features of one's concerns.

Rawls calls his theory a form of "Kantian constructivism." Like other broad Kantians, he rejects a picture of reason as discovering independent moral facts. "Moral objectivity is to be understood in terms of a suitably constructed social point of view that all can accept. Apart from the procedure of constructing the principles of justice, there are no moral facts."[51] He speaks of "the search for reasonable grounds for reaching agreement rooted in our conception of ourselves and our relation to society." Out goes any "search for moral truth interpreted as fixed by a prior and independent order of objects and relations, . . . an order apart and distinct from how we conceive of ourselves." It is best to endorse moral principles not as true but as "reasonable for us."[52]

Words like these might be read to suggest that as theorists we must step aside, to await the outcome of a social procedure. In the meantime we must regard ourselves not as theorists, each able, in principle, to reach conclusions himself, but as participants in the social construction of reasonable moral standards. This would be a sharp departure from the usual conception of moral justification.

Such an interpretation, though, would raise a grave worry, for social procedures can be horrendous. In that case, principles may be constructed through an actual social procedure, but we ought not to accept those principles as a reasonable morality—reasonable

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[51] John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 519.
[52] Ibid.

for us. Reasonable principles must emerge from social procedures that are, in some sense, *suitable.* That gives the moral theorist a job: to say what social procedures would be thus suitable, what procedures count as yielding reasonable principles. And indeed if the theorist can answer that, he may have a further job. We in our society, after all, have never completed a fully suitable procedure. Still, we want to say now what principles of morality are reasonable for us. Perhaps the theorist can settle what principles we would construct if we did engage in a suitable procedure.[53]

It may be in this spirit that Rawls is working, addressing the hypothetical question, How would a suitable procedure for the social construction of moral rules come out? Construction then enters at two points: the theorist constructs a social point of view, a hypothetical circumstance for the choice of moral principles, and hypothetical choosers construct the moral principles that best serve their ends. The hypothetical choosers are "agents of construction" in both senses: the theorist constructs them and they construct principles.

What, then, is constructivism in general? We might read it as another term for what Rawls earlier called "hypothetical contractarianism." Brian Barry proposes a nutshell characterization along these lines, speaking of theories of justice in particular.[54] Constructivism, he says, is "the doctrine that what would be agreed on in some specified kind of situation constitutes justice."[55] This is to treat justice as purely procedural at base. The choice situation is

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[53]See, also, Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (1985): 223–51, especially 226–31 and 235–39. Rawls again rejects truth as a goal, and substitutes finding a conception of justice "that can serve as a basis of informed and willing political agreement between citizens viewed as free and equal persons" (230). This might seem to suggest that the only test for proposed principles of justice is an actual procedure eventuating in "informed and willing agreement" to those principles. In this article too, though, Rawls moves to a hypothetical agreement. Appropriate conditions "must situate free and equal citizens fairly" (235).

[54]Rawls himself has mostly confined his theorizing to justice, and in "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" he seeks a rationale for principles of justice that will not be dependent on any one comprehensive moral doctrine, but rather can attract an overlapping consensus (246–47).

[55]Brian Barry, *Theories of Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 268.

not designed to yield outcomes that are just by some independent standard—as cutting and choosing leads selfish people to equal division of a cake. Rather, the very fact that something would be agreed upon in the specified situation is what makes it constitute justice. As for the agreement situation itself, it "is specified by a description of the actors in it (including their knowledge and objectives) and the norms governing their pursuit of their objectives: what moves are to be legitimate. And the 'emergence' is to be a particular kind of emergence, namely, the result of the actors in the situation pursuing their given objectives within the given constraints."[56]

This suggests an even wider reading of the term constructivism: the constructivist is a hypothetical proceduralist. He endorses some hypothetical procedure as determining which principles constitute valid standards of morality. The procedure might be one of coming to agreement on a social contract, or it might be, say, one of deciding which moral code to support for one's society. A proceduralist, then, maintains there are no moral facts independent of the finding that a certain hypothetical procedure would have such and such an upshot.[57]

So understood, constructivism is not a metaethical position in the old sense. Hypothetical proceduralism does not pronounce on whether moral thinking is, at base, continuous or discontinuous with scientific thinking, or what kind of objectivity moral judgments can claim. Rather, it is a family of substantive normative theories—including hypothetical contractarian theories. A hypothetical contractarian with regard to justice maintains that justice is whatever would be agreed to in a certain hypothetical position. This is not a theory of the meaning of moral statements, and it is not a full theory of their justification. We can ask standard metaethical questions about a contractarian's claims: What do they mean? What would constitute justifying them? Two contractarians might embrace different hypothetical situations for agreement.

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[56]Ibid., 266.

[57]Rawls speaks of "pure procedural justice" as the basis for his theory (*A Theory of Justice*, 136). We take the term "proceduralism" from David M. Anderson, "Reconstructing the Justice Dispute in America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1990). Anderson gives an extended analysis and critique of what we are calling hypothetical proceduralism.

What, then, would be at issue between them? The answer might be naturalistic, intuitionistic, noncognitivistic, or reformist. What would it be to justify one claim as opposed to the other? Again, different traditional answers might be given.[58]

Rawls sounds metaethical when he renounces talk of moral truth, but this might be misleading. He says only that there is no moral truth "apart and distinct from how we conceive of ourselves." This would allow for a moral truth somehow dependent on our self-conception.[59] Old-fashioned moral theorists would then want this claim of dependence to be spelled out, and would proceed to ask what this claim means and how it could be justified.

Still, with Rawls's talk of rooting matters "in our conception of ourselves and our relation to society," he moves beyond the bare tenets of hypothetical proceduralism. Consider a hypothetical contractarian: He formulates a particular hypothetical circumstance in which parties are to agree on principles to govern themselves. He needs, though, to justify his choice of this circumstance, to justify the claim that the principles parties would choose in this particular circumstance are valid principles of justice. Constructivism, as Rawls thinks of it, might be a special view of what would constitute this justification. A constructivist theory might explain why some specific form of hypothetical contractarianism is the one that succeeds in identifying what is reasonable for us.[60]

How would it do this? Rawls has not offered detail about how his own form of contractarianism is to be justified, or what it has to do

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[58]Rawls has his own answer: we seek broad reflective equilibrium (*A Theory of Justice*, 46–53). But that is not part of contractarianism; it is a metaethical position in the old sense.

[59]This would still be a rejection of Platonism in ethics, which says we are equipped to apprehend ethical truths that hold independently of what we ourselves are like. In rejecting ethical Platonism, hypothetical proceduralists would not be alone; ethical Platonism these days has few defenders. (There are still live issues concerning Platonism, to be sure: how far ordinary moral thought is committed to it, how it goes wrong, and how alternatives are to cope with apparently Platonistic aspects of ordinary moral thought—accommodating or rejecting them.)

[60]Indeed, Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, suggests that the formulation of his theory in terms of a hypothetical choice is dispensable. The idea "is simply to make vivid to ourselves the restrictions that it seems reasonable to impose on arguments for principles of justice" (18). We could look at the original position as "an expository device" (21).

with the older frameworks in which the nature of moral judgment was debated. His words suggest, though, that he takes morals and science to have sharply different goals, and hopes that the right insights into the nature of morality will allow us to sidestep traditional metaethics.

Ethics is to be "the search for reasonable grounds for reaching agreement rooted in our conception of ourselves and our relation to society." These words may bear many interpretations. One is both Kantian and conceptually reformist.

Rawls declares himself broadly Kantian; he sees in constructivism a way of elucidating Kant's core insights. Morality is an aspect of practical reason; the search for moral principles consists in reasoning practically, not in tracking independent moral facts. What we validly decide is right or wrong is determined by the nature of our practical reason—in Rawls's case, by what he calls the "rational" and the "reasonable."

How might a construction express this? A constructivist, we might venture, begins with a source of moral concern, a vision of why morality matters to us. In Scanlon's version, it is "the desire to be able to justify one's actions to others on grounds they could not reasonably reject."[61] Rawls himself starts with two ideals: an ideal ("conception") of the person, and an ideal of the social role of morality (a "well-ordered society"). What, he asks, "would free and equal moral persons themselves agree upon, if they were fairly represented solely as such persons and thought of themselves as citizens living a complete life in an on-going society?"[62] Now if we can settle fully on a source of moral concern, perhaps we can find a hypothetical circumstance for agreement that fully speaks to it. Perhaps once we knew what would be agreed to in that circumstance, this knowledge would satisfy all the felt needs that bring us to ethical theory. Then we might no longer care what our moral questions originally meant, or what would have constituted justifying an answer to them. We might have sidestepped traditional metaethics.

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[61] T. M. Scanlon, "Contractualism and Utilitarianism," in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, ed. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 116.

[62] Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," 517.

In specifying a source of moral concern, though, a constructivist may face a dilemma. On one horn, he can specify the concern in broad, morally laden language. He can speak of "reasonable" circumstances for agreement, of people "fairly represented solely as free and equal moral beings," of grounds a person "could not reasonably reject." The import of these terms then needs to be specified. It is fine to start with suggestive motivations, but eventually implications must be spelled out, and that can give rise to interpretive problems and disputes. Suppose two people both want to abide by whatever contract they would negotiate in reasonable circumstances—but they fail to agree on which circumstances would be reasonable. Perhaps they simply want different things, and their discord is masked by vague language. Then the theorist can do no more than identify the content of their clashing wants. Perhaps, though, they are in genuine disagreement about what circumstances would be reasonable. If so, old metaethical questions return in new guise. What is at issue in disputes over what is reasonable? What would justify accepting one answer and rejecting another?

On the other horn, the constructivist might stipulate a source of moral concern quite precisely. Concern with justice, he might specify, is concern to abide by the agreement that would be framed in such and such exact circumstances. We listeners, though, may not be at all sure that this concern is precisely the one we have. And if we are told that this, at any rate, is the concern that would constitute a concern with justice, we shall find this claim disputable. It amounts to dogmatically claiming that some specific version of hypothetical contractarianism is correct: that the valid principles of justice are the ones we would have framed in such and such circumstances. Adherents of rival versions of hypothetical contractarianism will dispute this claim, and then, again, old metaethical issues reappear. What is at issue between the disputants, and how would either claim be justified?

A constructivist might sidestep these questions if he could articulate a concern we all found, on consideration, to be all we want from morality. This concern would have to be put in exact terms, and to hold our allegiance even when so put. This is the achievement that might render traditional metaethics obsolete. Or at least it might cause us to find the old metaethical questions less pressing—though we might still ask whether the root concern we found

so unproblematic was really justified, and why. In any case, if constructivism is to be metaethically ambitious, its hope must be to find such a specification.

Few constructivists so far would claim any such full success, and it may not be in the offing. Perhaps no constructivist has held such lofty metaethical ambitions. Constructivists have been mostly silent on the old metaethical questions, with not much explanation why. We have explored one possible rationale, but not the only one. Constructivists may simply not think they know what to say on these questions, and think that other questions can fruitfully be pursued in the meantime.[63]

A metaethically modest constructivism would try for important insights into the nature of morality, without claiming to preempt traditional metaethics. The prospects for such a modest constructivism may be brilliant, for anything we have argued. Going versions are so far of limited scope: they tend to deal specifically with social justice, and conceive of the principles of justice as governing a system of mutual benefit. Within this sphere at least, a modest constructivism may hold real promise. It envisions large parts of morality as justified by the social role morality can play, by the mutual appeal of the fruits of moral agreement. It elucidates prime sources of moral concern, and founds morality on the broad social agreement it would be reasonable to make.

Noncognitivism

If moral theorists cannot long evade questions of meaning, they may find their way back to variants of earlier metaethical theories. Recent years have seen new stirrings of noncognitivism. Noncognitivists claim that moral and scientific meanings differ sharply. Recent noncognitivists, though, have stressed similarities as well as differences. They have sought out aspects of objectivity that they can claim for morality, ways moral judgments mimic strict factual judgments.

A half-century ago, Moore's tests seemed to force anyone to noncognitivism, even kicking and screaming. Subsequent philo-

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[63]Rawls took a view like this in *A Theory of Justice*; see 51–52.

sophical developments open up better alternatives—or so many philosophers think. Noncognitivists deny this, and so in part their work has been to attack the proffered alternatives. Old problems beset new cognitivisms, they insist.

In addition, though, new problems beset old noncognitivisms, and so noncognitivism has had to develop or die. The new problems come in three clusters. One concerns meaning, objectivity, and the sense in which moral judgments could be noncognitive. A second concerns the state of mind a moral statement expresses. Finally, there is the problem of moral terms in complex grammatical contexts.

First, then, meaning and objectivity: Quine's attacks on a philosophically useful analytic-synthetic distinction, along with new Wittgensteinian treatments of language, not only made alternatives to noncognitivism seem newly eligible; they left it unclear whether noncognitivism itself constitutes a distinct position. Once old theories of cognitive content fall, what is the noncognitivist denying?

Current noncognitivists, then, navigate precariously between two shoals. A classic problem for noncognitivists is that moral judgments have so many earmarks of claims to objective truth. A successful noncognitivism must explain away these earmarks. At the same time, if noncognitivism is to be distinct from cognitivism, it must insist that some judgments are cognitive in contrast with moral judgments. Noncognitivism is threatened not only by hardening values to make them like the hard facts of old; it is threatened by softening facts to make them more like emotive values. Often opponents of noncognitivism work at bridging the fact-value gap from both ends.

Finally, noncognitivists may find themselves losing an exchange with reforming cognitivists. The reformer debunks: he thinks our old concepts are confused, or perhaps even rooted in error. Still, they serve a valuable purpose, he thinks, and a reform will serve that purpose without error or confusion. Now the noncognitivist has a hard time avoiding a stance that is likewise debunking, at least to a degree. Is there nothing to the ordinary sense that right and wrong are properties? If the noncognitivist thinks ordinary thought is confused on this score, he must admit that his too is something of a reform. He then faces a challenge: A naturalistic reformer can retort, "Why not take my reform instead? Mine, after all, gives moral terms a meaning in the usual sense."

A noncognitivist will then have to argue that his is the better reform. We need a kind of language, he must say, that we come close to having already, but which until now has confused us. The naturalistic reformer, he must claim, beckons us to an overly stark linguistic world. In it we may still have overtly emotive language like "Yea!" and "Boo!" and "Yech!" Moral terms, though, are now like nonmoral terms: thanks to reforming definitions, they now have clear naturalistic criteria. The noncognitivist must say that the old, confused language had virtues this reform loses—virtues that can be preserved in his own reform, and without loss of clarity.

Blackburn argues that if objective-looking emotive predicates did not exist, we would have to invent them. Start with a language with interjections like "Hurrah!" and "Boo!" but no moral predicates like "right" and "wrong." This language does let us express attitudes. But what we need is "an instrument of serious, reflective evaluative practice, able to express concern for improvements, clashes, implications, and coherence of attitudes." To get this, we could "invent a predicate answering to the attitude, and treat commitments as if they were judgements, and then use all the natural devices for debating truth."[64] Blackburn gives this as his cashing out of a Hume-like metaphor, "projecting attitudes onto the world."[65]

Gibbard stresses coordination in a broad game-theoretic sense: narrowly moral judgments, along with normative judgments of other kinds, serve to coordinate actions and feelings. Such coordination is crucial to peaceful and cooperative life together. Appearances of objectivity—the various ways normative judgments mimic judgments of fact—promote this coordination. In evolutionary terms, a coordinating function helps explain why we have the dispositions to normative thought and language that we do. In evaluative terms, the goods that stem from social coordination give us reason to be glad we think and speak in these ways. They give us reason not to reform away the expressive, objective-like aspects of moral language.[66]

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[64]Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon, 1984), 195.

[65]Ibid., 170–71, 195.

[66]Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), especially 64–80, 293–300.

Current noncognitivists, then, stress the various ways in which a motivation-laden state of mind—an emotive disposition, a universal preference, or the acceptance of a system of norms—might mimic strict factual belief. For convenience, call any such state of mind an "attitude." In the first place, an attitude may be unconditional, applying even to situations where everyone lacks it.[67] In addition, a person's higher-order attitudes may require a given attitude, and require it of everyone.[68] Conversational demands may be made on behalf of an attitude, and other attitudes may sanction those demands.[69]

These features, we might say, "quasi-objectivize" attitudes.[70] A reforming noncognitivist must establish the need for attitudes of some sort that are quasi-objectivized frankly: for motivation-laden states that are not strict factual beliefs, but are treated in many ways as if they were. He claims that what goes on roughly with moral language—and overtly if his reform is accepted—is quasi-objectivizing thought about how to conduct ourselves, and perhaps how to feel about various aspects of life. The noncognitivist will claim that our rough tendencies to do this explain familiar features of moral discourse: the broad action-guidingness of this factual-seeming discourse. It also explains what has been called the "essential contestability" of moral concepts:[71] If a moral term is tied by its very meaning to questions of how to live, any stipulation of a factual property it is to stand for forecloses some questions of how to live—questions we may need to treat quasi-objectively.

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[67]R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking*, 208–9; Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 11; Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 164–66.

[68]Harry Frankfurt invokes higher-order desires in "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 5–25. Blackburn, in *Spreading the Word*, speaks of how admirable one finds a moral sensibility. Gibbard, in *Wise Choices*, develops a theory of higher-order norms (168–250).

[69]C. L. Stevenson proposed that to call something good is to say, "I like it; do so as well." See "The Emotive Theory of Ethical Terms," *Mind* 46 (1937): 21–25. Gibbard calls this "do so as well" a conversational demand, and develops a theory of norms for conversational demands. See Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 172–208.

[70]Blackburn speaks of "quasi-realism" (*Spreading the Word*, 171 and elsewhere).

[71]W. B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 56 (1955–56): 167–98.

All this leaves the question, Is any contrast left between value and fact? Once we are using all the usual devices for debating the truth of moral judgments, does this quasi-truth differ from a real truth we can seriously accept in other realms of language? A "noncognitivist" and a "moral realist" might agree about how moral language works, and disagree only about whether some other kinds of language—scientific language in particular—are descriptive in a way that moral language is not.

This has been one of the most active areas of contention between noncognitivists and those who deny a contrast between moral and "factual" concepts. Those maintaining the contrast claim that on our best, naturalistic view of the universe, factual concepts play an explanatory role that moral concepts do not.[72] Opponents find moral concepts explanatory in the same ways as the concepts used in psychosociological explanation, or they liken moral qualities to secondary quality concepts, factual though not ultimately explanatory.[73] One noncognitivist, Blackburn, argues for another contrast: moral properties are peculiarly supervenient, in a way that is explained if they are quasi-objectivized sentiments.[74] Crispin Wright distinguishes a "thin" truth that moral statements can attain from a substantial truth with various marks of objectivity. To claim substantial truth, one must explain how we have a cognitive capacity to detect the property in question, so that absent any impediment to proper functioning of this capacity, one gets the property right.[75]

Turn now to the second cluster of problems current noncognitivists must sort through: the problem of complex contexts. Most noncognitivists are *expressivists*: they explain moral language as expressing moral judgments, and explain moral judgments as some-

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[72]Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, 6–7; Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 164–65, 185–86; Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 107–25.

[73]Respectively, among others, Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations," in *Morality, Reason, and Truth*, ed. David Copp and David Zimmerman (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985), 49–78; John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Properties," in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 110–29.

[74]Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 182–89.

[75]A rough gloss of Crispin Wright, "Realism, Antirealism, Irrealism, Quasi-Realism," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 12, ed. Peter French, Theodore Uehling, and Howard Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 25–49.

thing other than beliefs.[76] As for what special kind of state of mind a moral judgment is, different expressivists say different things, and each account has its problems.

Emotivists hold that a moral judgment consists in a feeling—or better, in a disposition to have certain feelings. It seems, though, that a person can judge something wrong even if he has lost all disposition to feelings about it. As Ewing and Brandt had suggested decades earlier, moral judgments seem not to be moral sentiments or dispositions to certain moral sentiments, but judgments of what moral sentiments are fitting or justified.[77]

Moreover, if moral judgments are dispositions to feelings, will any old feeling do? What, then, differentiates moral judgments from any other kind of standing like or dislike? Perhaps there are special feelings of moral disapproval, and calling something "wrong," say, expresses such a special feeling—or the corresponding attitude. What, then, is this feeling of moral disapproval? Among theorists of emotion, cognitivists predominate. Emotional "cognitivism" is different from metaethical cognitivism: an emotional cognitivist thinks that having a given emotion, such as anger, involves making some special kind of cognitive judgment. Now in the case of moral disapproval, the only plausible candidate is a cognitive judgment that the thing in question is morally wrong. If so, we need to understand judgments of wrongness before we can understand moral disapproval. We cannot *explain* the judgment that something is wrong as an attitude of moral disapproval.

The sensibility theorists discussed below hold that both directions of explanation are correct: Disapproving something must be explained as feeling that it is wrong, and conversely, to judge something wrong is to judge that it merits disapproval. If this is right,

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[76]According to Ayer, for instance, moral judgments are emotions; according to Hare, they are universal, overriding preferences. Stevenson stands out among classical noncognitivists as a nonexpressivist: in his analysis of "It is good" as "I like it, do so as well," the noncognitive element is the demand "do so as well." Wright, in "Realism, Antirealism," rejects expressivism. Moral assertions aim to be assertions of truths, not expressions of a state of mind—though the truths are thin.

[77]A. C. Ewing, *The Definition of Good* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), especially 168–69; R. B. Brandt, "Moral Valuation," *Ethics* 56 (1946): 106–21.

then although moral concepts are to some degree explained in terms of feelings, the explanations are not of the broadly reductive kind an emotivist seeks: they do not explain moral concepts in terms that could be fully understood prior to grasping moral concepts.

Hare sets out to avoid the emotivists' pitfalls. A moral judgment, he says, is a special state of preference—a preference that is "overriding" and "universal." It is a preference all told and not merely one preference tendency among others. It is uninfluenced by who is who in the situation to which it applies.[78] Now one consequence is that a person can never want wrong things done—things he judges wrong, that is. If he thinks it would be wrong for the governor to pardon a murderer, then he must want not to be pardoned himself in the hypothetical case of being the murderer. Hare embraces this consequence; many others find it implausible.[79]

Gibbard rejects emotivism, and adopts a part of Ewing's rival view: moral judgments concern which moral sentiments are warranted or justified. Whereas Ewing was a nonnaturalist about warrant, though, Gibbard remains expressivist: he gives an expressivistic account of judgments of warrant. To call a feeling warranted, he says, is (roughly) to express one's acceptance of norms that permit the feeling. Moral judgments, then, express a state of mind that is not, in the strictest sense, belief in a moral fact. Neither, though, is it a feeling or a disposition to feelings. Rather, it is a complex state of mind that consists in accepting certain norms. His problem, then, is to explain, in psychological terms, what it is to accept norms.[80]

Moral judgments are "normative," everyone agrees, but there is great disagreement among philosophers as to what this normativity consists in. According to Gibbard, it consists in a tie to warrant, and the concept of warrant is *sui generis*. Making a judgment of warrant consists in being in a special, motivation-laden state—namely, accepting a system of norms. Feelings, then, are not treated as nor-

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[78]See, among other places, R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking*, 20–24, 107–16.
[79]Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 67–85; *Moral Thinking*, 57–60.
[80]Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, especially 45–80.

mative judgments in themselves. Rather, the special normative judgments that constitute moral convictions consist in accepting norms to govern certain feelings. Norms are motivation-laden, and at the same time, they are crucially discursive and subject to reasoning. They can bear the full weight of quasi-objectivization as discussed above—so Gibbard claims.

Still, like the emotivists, Gibbard holds that moral feelings help explain moral judgments. Moral judgments are judgments about whether guilt and impartial anger are warranted. Gibbard, then, must reject emotional cognitivism. Along with the emotivists, he owes an explanation of specially moral feelings—guilt and impartial anger, in his book—in terms that do not require a prior understanding of moral judgments. Emotional cognitivism has its problems: on the surface, it seems quite possible to feel guilty, say, and yet reject the (purportedly cognitive) claim that one has done wrong. One may think one's guilt irrational. Gibbard surveys lines of psychological explanation of emotions that could fit a Ewing-like theory.[81]

Turn finally to the charge that expressivism fails with "embedded contexts." When a person calls something "wrong," expressivists say, he is not stating a purported fact; he is expressing a special state of mind—a feeling or attitude, say. Now at best, such an account works for simple ascriptions of rightness or wrongness. It does not extend to more elaborate uses of moral language, as in "He did something wrong," or "If taking bribes is wrong, then so is offering them."[82]

Blackburn and Gibbard both take up this problem. Blackburn adopts a strategy of separate explanations for various different grammatical constructions; he works on conjunctions and on conditionals. "If lying is wrong, then so is getting your little brother to lie" expresses rejection of a kind of sensibility: one that condemns lying and yet condones getting little brother to lie.[83] Gibbard attempts a more uniform explanation of normative terms in embed-

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[81]Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 129–47.
[82]Peter Geach, "Imperative and Deontic Logic," *Analysis* 18 (1958): 49–56, at 54n.; John Searle, "Meaning and Speech Acts," *Philosophical Review* 71 (1962): 423–32; Geach, "Assertion," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 449–65. Geach attributes the point to Frege.
[83]Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 189–96.

ded contexts: Complex normative judgments are to be explained by their inferential ties to simple normative ascriptions, and to factual judgments. A special class of simple normative ascription—judgments of what is warranted for oneself right now—has a special tie to the world: these judgments tend to motivate. All this makes for a radical modification of expressivism.[84]

Perhaps noncognitivism is obsolete—because it fails with embedded contexts, or because it clings to a bad theory of meaning, or because all refinements that could matter were worked out some time ago. It can seem a theory to beat or fall back on, but not to develop. A handful of authors now see it as full of unrealized possibilities. Some opponents, on the other hand, find the whole list of traditional metaethical possibilities unappetizing, and look for sharply new alternatives. To some of these we now turn.

SENSIBILITY THEORIES

Several of the most influential contemporary writers on the nature of ethics and value, notably John McDowell and David Wiggins, have drawn inspiration from the idea that normative or evaluative judgments might bear some analogy with judgments of secondary qualities, or other judgments essentially tied to the exercise of certain human sensibilities.[85] This analogy holds out the possibility of a cognitivist version of discontinuity, since the judgments tied to the exercise of these sensibilities might be seen as straightforwardly cognitive[86] while yet concerning properties that

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[84]Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 92–102.

[85]See especially J. McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," and "Projection and Truth in Ethics," Lindley Lecture (University of Kansas, 1987); and D. Wiggins, "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life," "Truth, and Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgments," and "A Sensible Subjectivism?" reprinted in his *Needs, Values, and Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). For expository purposes, we will not always distinguish normative (deliberative) and evaluative (value-appreciating) judgments, although sensibility theorists have noticed that they may need different treatment. Wiggins, for example, develops his view for "particular pure valuations," and finds "more questionable" its extension to moral judgments in general ("Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgments," 161).

[86]'Cognitive' both in the sense of "being apt for truth evaluation" and "being the exercise of a cognitive faculty," on analogy, for example, with

are neither part of the fundamental causal/explanatory structure
of the world in their own right nor reducible to properties that are.
That is, even though such properties would not meet the most
ambitious naturalistic strictures, their place in cognition could
nonetheless be secure in virtue of their presence to experience and
the existence of a fairly well-articulated "space of reasons" regu-
lating their application.[87]

For example, physical science has moved away from color as a
significant dimension of similarity in its classification of substances
or entities, so that its fundamental explanations are "colorless";
nonetheless, color is a definite feature of our experience, and our
attribution of color is an exercise of a perceptual faculty regulated
by standards for appraising judgers as better- or worse-situated
(e.g., with regard to "standard conditions of viewing") for the de-
tection of color properties, and for appraising judgments as better-
or worse-supported by evidence. We clearly recognize greater or
lesser degrees of refinement in capacities accurately to discern
color, and this possibility of *corrected* judgments and *improved* dis-
cernment is manifest in a practice in which we give reasons and
make arguments in ways by no means arbitrary or idiosyncratic,
but rather capable of yielding considerable interpersonal conver-
gence in judgment. All of this is compatible with the fact that color
attribution is, at bottom, dependent upon human subjectivity. So,
even though it has turned out that the properties discerned by this

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perception. Wiggins is careful to distinguish the "cognitive aspiration" of
evaluative or normative discourse from success in meeting this aspiration;
for both areas of discourse, he appears to hold, a "cognitive underdeter-
mination" exists and helps explain their (claimed) "essential contestability."
See his "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life." It should be men-
tioned here that Wiggins prefers to call his position "subjectivism,"
whereas McDowell sees his view as a form of "moral realism."

[87]It is somewhat problematic to characterize sensibility theories as ver-
sions of "discontinuity," for an advocate of this sort of view can also soften
up the "fact" side of the traditional fact/value dichotomy by insisting that
in science, too, the notion of truth is *constitutively* tied to the idea of good
reasons and arguments, so that we cannot think of Facts of Nature, ready-
made, without the help of our going evaluative practices. McDowell ap-
pears to be advocating such a softening of the notion of scientific fact in his
critical notice of Bernard Williams's *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, in
Mind 95 (1986): 377–86. However, since the relevant notions of "good
reasons and arguments" can be thought of as importantly different in
science versus morality, discontinuity can still be upheld.

practice do not have (what Crispin Wright has called) a "wide cosmological role" akin to primary qualities,[88] and that they depend for their presence in experience upon "rationally optional" sensibilities, this need not undermine their cognitive, even objective, standing—unless, that is, one presupposes a "scientistic" or "cosmological" conception of cognitivity and objectivity.[89]

Thus, sensibility theorists present their approach as a significant improvement over both noncognitivism and Intuitionism. Noncognitivism has, in their view, rightly stressed the contribution of sentiment to moral judgment, but wrongly forced such judgments into the mold of expressive projection. Intuitionism has, again in their view, rightly stressed the cognitive aspects of value judgment, but wrongly forced such judgments into the mold of detecting a special realm of independently existing properties. The sensibility theorist sees neither moral sentiment nor moral properties as able to do without—or to explain away—the other.[90] As noted earlier, the resulting view embraces both "directions of explanation," and is claimed to do greater justice to the cognitive grammar of evaluative and normative discourse and to the phenomenology of moral experience.

But what of the supposed internal connection between moral judgment and motivation or will, a connection that has done so much to account for the appeal of noncognitivism in this century?

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[88]See Crispin Wright, "Moral Values, Projection, and Secondary Qualities," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 62 (suppl.) (1988) for related discussion.

[89]For the dual character of such concepts as objective and subjective, see Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism?" especially 201–2. There is, of course, a long tradition of viewing secondary qualities as suspect, and secondary-quality attributions as erroneous, albeit perhaps cognitive. A sensibility theorist will argue that this view of secondary qualities is wrong. See McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities." For discussion of "scientism," see McDowell, "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World," in *Pleasure, Preference, and Value: Studies in Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), especially 14–16.

[90]McDowell remarks that "the sentiments [need not] be regarded as parents of apparent features; it may be pairs of sentiments and features reciprocally related—siblings rather than parents and children." See "Projection and Truth in Ethics," 12.

McDowell made possible a significant innovation within the con-
temporary English tradition of nonreductionist cognitivism by
showing the availability of an alternative explanation of this con-
nection: the very sensibility that gives individuals the capacity to
discern these sensibility-tied properties could, he urged, necessarily
involve possession of certain affective or conative propensities.

Humor, for example, is a sense that also is affective; a person
with no sense of humor is not someone who discerns the humor in
comic situations but simply fails to be amused. Rather, he misses
their humorousness altogether. He may, it is said, fully grasp the
primary, causal/explanatory qualities of the situations in question;
yet there is something about these situations to which he is blind.
This blindness stems in part from the absence of a sensibility. This
is not akin to the mere absence of a "laugh reflex": it involves a lack
of appreciation of reasons for amusement. There may—although
this has yet to be shown—be no way of explaining the nature of
these reasons, or the nature of the property humorousness, itself,
except by depending upon the notion of finding things funny. A
circular relation between the sensibility and the property would
explain why humorousness seems *sui generis* and unanalyzable, on
the one hand, while on the other hand being, for those with a sense
of humor, "action-guiding" (so to speak) in a familiar way. If our
humorless person were to develop a sense of humor, he would both
see the comic features of the world around him (and thus over-
come his cognitive lack) and find that they *are* amusing (and thus
overcome his affective lack).

Obligation and value might similarly involve a matched pair of
sensibility and property.[91] To take the case of obligation: Suppose

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[91]Once again, a more careful account would attend to relevant differ-
ences between obligation and value. For example, the phenomenology of
value might be thought to turn on some notion of "attraction," the phe-
nomenology of obligation upon a "must." The general picture suggested
by Wiggins in "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life"—in which the
relevant "secondary quality" is a kind of attractive highlighting of the
landscape of choice brought about by the agent (cf. 137)—is more apt for
the former; the picture suggested by McDowell in "Are Moral Require-
ments Hypothetical Imperatives?"—in which the phenomenology seems to
be more than a matter of seeing an option "in a favorable light," since it
involves the silencing of various competing considerations—is more apt

that a child has accidentally become separated from his parents and is wandering down the sidewalk, lost and distressed. A passing individual lacking in moral sensibility might observe this scene and see it as merely curious or annoying, but not as *calling for* intervention. Such a person would not be someone who perceived the *needfulness* of the child's situation but simply failed to feel moved to help. Rather, he would be blind to the needfulness itself.[92] Were the defects in our pedestrian's moral character overcome, he would both see the situation in a way that inherently involves a claim for remedy and find himself motivated to help (or, at least, to feel a certain remorse should he fail to do so).

In this way a sensibility theorist seeks to reconcile cognitivism with the "action-guiding" character of moral judgment that has been thought to tell decisively for noncognitivism: appropriate motivational tendencies are part of the sensibility necessary for the cognitive discernment of certain *sui generis*, but nonetheless genuine, properties. Further, this could contribute to our understanding of the "thickness" of concepts like need, their seemingly inextricable and symmetric fusion of descriptive content and action-guidingness. Speakers who possess authority about the extension of thick concepts to novel cases will be led both by the affective force of their sensibility and by the descriptive features of the world to which this sensibility is attuned.[93]

The sensibility theorist's account would also help explain why (according to a long tradition) moral demands are experienced by those who recognize them as categorical rather than hypothetical.[94] A person with a well-developed moral sensibility will not see the needfulness of the child's situation and then require, as a further condition for rational action, awareness of a desire or interest on

for the latter. The distinction between value and obligation are reflected in an older phenomenological tradition, and also, more empirically, in Gestalt psychology. Wiggins and McDowell have attempted to ward off the confusions that have beset recent debates over "moral realism" when the categories of value and obligation are not appropriately distinguished.

[92]Needfulness involves a lack, but not a mere lack: a lack that merits or requires attention. Compare the Pittsburghese idiom, "This needs fixed."

[93]On the idea of a "thick concept," see Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 129, 143–45. In his critical notice of Williams's book, McDowell suggests why, on a view like his, reflection need not emerge as the sort of threat to moral knowledge it does in Williams's account (382–83).

[94]See McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?"

her own part that aiding the child would satisfy. Rather, her very recognition of the needfulness depends upon her being so constituted as to be disposed both to meet it and to find competing *desires* or *interests* inappropriate or overridden or less compelling than they otherwise would have been.[95] (Though, of course, the agent might also recognize—and have to weigh—other *moral* requirements or claims of need.)

However, it is important to emphasize that this account captures only part of what Kant intended by the notion of a categorical imperative, since it does not follow from what has been said that it would be a defect in rationality or autonomy for someone to lack a sensibility that would permit him to descry moral properties. And McDowell apparently does not suppose that such a lack must be a *rational* defect.[96] This is one way one might be led to raise questions about the capacity of sensibility theories to capture the normative force of moral discourse or provide justification or objectivity for morality.

Indeed, for all that we have said thus far, a moral sensibility and a sense of humor are on a par, with perhaps this difference: it appears to be part of a moral sensibility that (at least a subclass of) the properties it enables one to discern have the effect, when recognized, of silencing or outweighing or making less compelling other sorts of reasons or motives in practical deliberation. Could this feature of moral judgments be used to distinguish morality or to justify its special deliberative weight? This seems doubtful, since

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[95]McDowell favors the view that recognition of a moral requirement by a virtuous person silences competing desires:

> If a situation in which a virtue imposes a requirement is genuinely conceived as such, according to this view, then considerations which, in the absence of this requirement, would have constituted reasons for acting otherwise are silenced altogether—not overridden—by the requirement. (Ibid. 26)

Wiggins appears content with the weaker position that the *content* of judgments of moral requirement is categorical—in the sense that it "carries no reference whatever to my inclinations"—though its *motivational force* is simply that of a "good reason," not always a "better reason" than any stemming from my interests. (See his "Reply to Peter Railton," forthcoming in J. Haldane and C. Wright, *Reality, Representation and Projection*.)

[96]"Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" 13. As mentioned in the previous note, Wiggins departs further from Kant in allowing that other, noncategorical reasons might (rationally) outweigh moral requirements.

many alternative schemes of normative regulation will support sensibilities that constitutively involve claims of precedence in practical deliberation. Perhaps, for example, only those truly devout really experience the sanctity of certain objects, places, and rites, and for such individuals the sacred *will* call for precedence over appetite or interest. Similarly, *mutatis mutandis*, for those genuinely diabolical, or for the true aesthete. A circular account identifies a structural relationship between a sensibility and its matched property, but since neither is independently characterized, we do not as yet have a way of distinguishing one such sensibility from another[97]—much less of showing one to have a different normative or objective status from another. A peg that fits a round hole has a particular shape; so does a hole that fits a square peg; but what shape in particular do an otherwise unspecified peg and hole have thanks to the fact that they fit each other?

Circular characterizations are not entirely uninformative. For example, if the following circular characterization of *good* is held to be *a priori*:

(1) x is good if and only if x is such as to elicit in us (in "normal circumstances") a sentiment of moral approbation,

then an *a priori* link is being claimed between the property of goodness and a human sentiment, and this might be challenged.[98] Now,

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[97]For related criticism of circular accounts of color as accounts of content, see Paul A. Boghossian and J. David Velleman, "Colour as a Secondary Quality," *Mind* 98 (1989): 81–103, especially 89–90. Their discussion turns on a more subtle point. A sensibility theorist might urge that we not take over-literally the idea that value or obligation is like redness in being a content of experience, but one can hardly say the same about redness itself. Yet a circular account makes it unclear how redness *could* be a content of experience. To the extent that the sensibility theorist's account of the tie between judgment and motivation does depend upon taking this analogy with the experience of redness seriously (see note 110, below), sensibility theories would inherit this more subtle difficulty as well.

[98]Wiggins writes:

Circularity as such is no objection to it, provided that the offending formulation is also *true*. But what use (I shall be asked) is such a circular formulation? My answer is that, by tracing out such a circle, the subjectivist hopes to elucidate the concept of value by displaying it in its actual involvement with the sentiments. ("A Sensible Subjectivism?" 189)

if the sentiment of moral approbation had a robust and distinctive phenomenology—the way, for example, redness does—then a circular *a priori* equation might simply be a way of saying that the domain of this property is determined by reference to a *sui generis* qualitative state. Thanks to the distinctive character of such a qualitative state, the circular equation would afford a way of *distinguishing* the property (though not of *analyzing* it reductively). But no such robust and distinctive phenomenology exists—or so it seems to us—in the case of moral judgments.[99]

Alternatively, if there were *a priori* ties radiating out from moral approbation—for example, to a *substantively* characterized "space of reasons" that regulates moral approval—then the circular equation would effect a linkage between moral properties and a distinctive class of reasons. These reasons would not need to support anything so strong as an analysis or reduction of moral judgments in order to contribute materially to distinguishing a moral sensibility from others structurally similar, and to open the possibility of a nonreductive "placing" or vindication of morality.[100] However, when McDowell raises the question whether the standing of morality can

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Of course, one could read (1) in such a way as to make even "involvement with the sentiments" uninformative—if "normal circumstances" were specified to mean "whatever circumstances are necessary in order to guarantee that moral judgments are correct." The interest of (1), then, depends upon avoiding such a trivialization of "normal circumstances" (or, for that matter, of "us").

[99]For example, the convergence of color judgments among ordinary human observers speaking a given language but holding otherwise diverse opinions is a noteworthy difference from the moral case. Moreover, though there may be something to the idea of a "Gestalt" of value or obligatoriness when we experience certain simple and familiar cases, when we face more complex or novel moral questions—for example, questions about distributive justice—where multiple trade-offs and aggregation are involved, it looks as if any experienced "attraction" or "must" will be the result of a complex deliberation, not something that straightforwardly guides judgment. A complex blending of colors still strikes us irresistibly as a color, and close attention to its qualitative character typically guides our classificatory response; the blending of moral considerations may yield a *judgment* that a certain policy or course of action is best, or most just, but not thanks to any irresistible qualitative state to which one can attend closely and that guides judgment (at least, not if the authors' moral experience is typical).

[100]Wiggins might be broaching the idea of such a development of sensibility theory when he notes (in "A Sensible Subjectivism?" 188) that there in fact are *two* elements in a characterization of moral approval, not one:

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be defended against "the idea that there is nothing to ethical think-
ing but rationally arbitrary subjective stances," he concludes that
"the necessary scrutiny does not involve stepping outside the point
of view constituted by an ethical sensibility."[101] This suggests that
appeal to the "space of reasons" linked to a moral sensibility might
not improve our grip on the content or normative standing of
moral judgments after all.

Perhaps it is misguided to seek a better grip on the content or
standing of moral judgment—explication and justification do have
to come to an end somewhere. Yet it would seem to matter a good
deal where. Many rationally optional "subjective stances" with the
same structure as morality would appear to be candidates for our
allegiance—and some have been in real social competition with
morality. Yet we tend to think something more can be said on
behalf of morality. McDowell rightly points out that the appeal to
internal reasons permits deployment of the full critical resources of
our moral thinking, so that it will not be true that anything goes.[102]
At the same time, however, this will not distinguish or justify the
seeking and following of internal reasons within a moral scheme
from the seeking and following of internal reasons within struc-
turally similar alternative schemes.

Wiggins appears to have taken the question of "objective justifi-
cation," as he calls it, somewhat further. He asks us to suppose that
our moral practices are "off the ground" already, so there is no
problem of trying to see how they might raise themselves by their
own bootstraps. Then, he urges, we might be objectively justified in
"simple acceptance" of the dictates of our moral sensibility if at
least two further conditions are met: (i) the sensibility and practices
with which moral judgment is bound up are important to our iden-

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Surely a sentiment of approbation cannot be identified except by its association
[a] with the thought or feeling that *x* is good (or right or beautiful) and [b] with
the various considerations in which that thought can be grounded, given some
particular item and context, *in situ*.

Care is needed here. Any account of (b) that went as far as stating logically
sufficient "ground[s]" would create the risk of affording epistemic access
to moral facts on the part of those without proper moral character, spoil-
ing the sensibility theorist's account of the tie between judgment and mo-
tivation.

[101]McDowell, "Projection and Truth in Ethics," 4–5, 9.

[102]Ibid., 9.

tities as individuals, so that life is "scarcely conceivable without them"; and (ii) these practices are not "manifestly unjust."[103] The first condition will strike some as overly strong on the point of psychic investment; the second, either as an internal condition once again—if, that is, justice is understood by the lights of the sensibility itself—or as a restatement of the problem of objective justification.

It is important to distinguish questions about objective justification from the question whether moral or evaluative discourse, when circularly characterized, is inevitably relativistic. As Wiggins notes, relativism can be avoided if our (circular) characterizations contain an expression that rigidly designates our actual dispositions to respond, following a strategy that does in some respects clearly fit our color discourse.[104] The property of redness is plausibly seen as tied down *a priori* to the features that elicit a red response in humans as they actually are. To imagine humans with a different color sensibility is not to imagine that blood, say, would have had a different color, but only that humans might have seen red things differently. This would, if granted, suffice to rule out a kind of color relativism, and a similar rigidification would rule out certain forms of evaluative or deliberative relativism.

But does rigidification contribute to "objective justication"? It, in effect, guarantees *a priori* that the names 'goodness' and 'rightness', say, belong to properties tracked by *our* sensibilities.[105] Would that tend to show that we are justified in regulating our choices accordingly? Proprietary labeling seems to remove the threat of relativism from our evaluative language without addressing underlying worries about the possible arbitrariness of our evaluative practices,

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[103]"Reply to Peter Railton." Wiggins also mentions—in a somewhat different connection—the condition that an individual seeking justification not be "on the margins of society . . . [or] systematically disadvantaged by the workings or practices of [the prevailing] morality."

[104]"A Sensible Subjectivism?" 206. For discussion, see the contributions of Michael Smith and Mark Johnston to the symposium "Dispositional Theories of Value," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 63 (suppl.) (1989). Such a rigidifying strategy was suggested by Martin Davies and Lloyd Humberstone, "Two Notions of Necessity," *Philosophical Studies* 38 (1980): 1–30.

[105]Of course, other societies may have homonyms for 'good' and 'right', linked *a priori* to *their* dispositions. What looks like a disagreement with them over what is good or right might therefore actually be equivocation. See Johnston, "Dispositional Theories," 166–70.

since the feature seized upon to privilege our practices is simply that they *are* our practices. This is not the sort of thing that carries much justificatory weight even within our moral scheme. Not only is it hard to imagine appealing to this feature in an attempted justification aimed at outsiders; it is hard to imagine it succeeding very far in showing nonarbitrariness to ourselves. Thus, we might be led to wonder whether such rigidification does fit a nonrevisionist account of our moral discourse: it might, for example, block expression in that discourse of certain serious, seemingly moral questions.

Sensibility theorists may well be right both about the cognitive character of moral discourse and about the cognitive—even *sui generis*—character of the distinctive sentiments morality engages. The special interest of sensibility theory in morality is that it may afford a way of understand how some form of action-guidingness might—without the demands of a Kantian theory of agency—be "built into" our moral discourse consistently with its possessing cognitivity and objectivity (at least in the sense of intersubjective convergence among "people of a certain culture who have what it takes to understand [the relevant] sort of judgment").[106]

However, sensibility theorists have also noted an important disanalogy between secondary qualities such as color and evaluative properties such as good. Suppose that we accept the following *a priori* equation for *red*, suspending for now any reservations we might have about its circularity:

(2) *x* is red if and only if *x* is such as to elicit in normal humans as they now are (and in "normal circumstances") the visual impression of redness.

Still, there remains a contrast with *good*. Consider now (a paraphrase of) Wiggins's suggested *a priori* equation for *good*, which involves a revision of (1) that introduces the disanalogy:

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[106]Wiggins, "Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgments," in *Needs, Values, and Truth*, 160. See, also, McDowell, "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World," 16n, and Wiggins, "What Would be a Substantial Theory of Truth?" in *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P. F. Strawson*, ed. Zak van Straaten (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon, 1980), 218–19.

(3) x is good if and only if x is such as to make appropriate for normal humans as they now are (and in "normal circumstances") a sentiment of moral approval.[107]

A noncognitivist would be quick to point out that the analogy with color (even if it otherwise were sound) breaks down precisely at the point one would expect were recognition of goodness fundamentally different from experiential knowledge, the point signaled by the replacement of the perceptual/explanatory expression 'elicit in' in (2) by the normative expression 'make appropriate for' in (3). Of course, once we have (2), it is clear why we are entitled to claim that exposure to normally-red-response-eliciting properties "makes appropriate" a red response (at least, in "normal circumstances" for normal human observers), and this epistemic certification does not require any reductive analysis of redness. The difficulty in the case of good, however, is that we are given nothing like (2) to underwrite the justificatory idiom—we instead are proffered the justificatory idiom itself, namely (3). In the absence both of a robust phenomenology and of a dispositional grounding on the model of (2), it becomes harder to say what the distinctive import of the secondary-quality model is, or whether it can serve to license cognitivism or objectivity about goodness (or rightness).

It is worth asking how much of the insight of sensibility theories could be preserved if one were to downplay the analogy to secondary qualities[108] and instead try to develop further the idea that

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[107]"Hume could have said that x is good/right/beautiful if and only if x is such as to make a certain sentiment of approbation *appropriate*" (Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism?" 187; see, also, 189). McDowell makes this contrast with the case of color in "Values and Secondary Qualities," 117–20.

[108]Wiggins at one point remarks that value does not so much appear to be one other part of the world that impinges upon the individual as it seems to be an aspect of the world that is *lit up* by the perspective of the agent. See his "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life," 137. For would-be value realists, this image may (if it is faithful to the phenomenology of value) be an improvement over Hume's suggestion that the agent's sensibilities "gild and stain" the world, since the latter seems to make inevitable a view of values as mere projections. Wiggins's image, however, also illustrates one other way in which the analogy with secondary qualities breaks down. For secondary qualities are examples *par excellence* of what presents itself in experience as a part of the world that impinges upon the individual.

various properties may depend in part on human sensibilities, but nonetheless have conditions of correctness and improvement and, thereby, cognitive (or objective) status.[109] Seen as examples of this general idea, sensibility theories could be very attractive indeed if the worries expressed above could be overcome, or explained away. Such theories would afford a cognitivist interpretation of morality able to supply a version of the internal connection between judgment and motivation that makes expressivism or projectivism attractive.[110] Moreover, they would manage to do so without noncognitivism's complex semantics and purportedly imperfect fit with the phenomenology of moral experience. And sensibility theories could appeal to their diagnosis of an underlying, circular involvement with our sentiments both to explain the often-claimed impossibility of analyzing moral predicates and to locate moral properties within our reach, thus reviving the prospects of a nonreductive moral realism without the dubious epistemology of turn-of-the-century Intuitionism. In these respects, these complex and fascinating theories pose the most important contemporary challenge to the terms of the standard, and perhaps stalemated, dialectic between noncognitivism and naturalistic cognitivism.

The excitement and promise of sensibility theories is that they seek to possess each of two usually-contrasted "directions of expla-

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[109]Giving a nontrivial account of "correction and improvement" is a crucial part of this task. For related discussion, see Crispin Wright, "Moral Values, Projection, and Secondary Qualities," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 62 (suppl.) (1988), and Mark Johnston, "Dispositional Theories of Value" and "Objectivity Refigured" (to appear in Haldane and Wright, *Reality, Representation and Projection*, along with a reply by Crispin Wright).

[110]Of course, on sensibility theories the connection is effected by the claim that a properly developed moral sensibility is a precondition for cognitive access to moral or value properties. This view may strike some as too limited—or, alternatively, as genuinely sublime—because it addresses itself so thoroughly to the condition of the virtuous. The view does seem most plausible when cognitive access to moral or value properties is viewed as conforming rather closely to the model of perceptual experience of seemingly ineffable secondary qualities, perhaps along the lines of our discussion above of humorlessness as a kind of "humor-blindness." Further argument would be needed to establish the ineffability of the humorous, the moral, or the evaluative, or to show why one might not be capable of judging correctly—by indirect means, to be sure—that some act *warrants* amusement or moral disapproval even if one oneself lacks the relevant sensibilities.

nation"; their risk, however—like the risk of Aesop's fox, who sought to possess both his bunch of grapes and (what turned out to be) their reflection—is that of genuinely possessing neither.

CONTINUITY

Cognitivism has its attractions, affording by far the most straight-forward account of the surface grammar of moral discourse, and promising to avoid revisionism about moral experience and argu-ment. It also has its costs. Sensibility theories seek to provide the attractions at reduced cost, though they may get what they pay for. Perhaps what is needed is a revival of substantive naturalism?[111] Such a revival *is* underway, but surely one is entitled to ask: Must the history of twentieth-century metaethics now be recapitulated?

Perhaps not. The first cycle of criticism of naturalism in this century was directed only at narrowly analytic naturalism; philos-ophy of language has moved on, and the prospects of naturalisms based on a more expansive view of analyticity, or on views of mean-ing that do not ask the analytic/synthetic distinction to do much work, are not well known. Thus, the possibility remains that a naturalistic account will emerge able to accommodate all the nor-mative characteristics and uses of moral discourse; or, at least, all such characteristics and uses as survive critical scrutiny.

With this possibility in mind, let us consider three contemporary naturalisms—neo-Aristotelian, postpositivist nonreductionist, and reductionist.[112]

Neo-Aristotelian. Philippa Foot argued, in a series of influential articles,[113] that it would manifest a kind of incompetence with the moral vocabulary to fail to see the inappropriateness of applying

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[111]For a brief, and hardly unproblematic, characterization of the dis-tinction between substantive and methodological naturalism, see P. Rail-ton, "Naturalism and Prescriptivity," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 7 (1989): 151–74, at 155–57. A noncognitivist—such as Gibbard—can be method-ologically naturalistic, but substantively anti- (or non-) naturalistic.

[112]Obviously these categories are not mutually exclusive or jointly ex-haustive—they serve here only to organize some competing positions for expository purposes.

[113]See in particular "Moral Arguments," "Moral Beliefs," "Goodness and Choice," and "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," all reprinted in *Virtues and Vices.*

moral terms strictly as a function of pro- or con-attitudes (even when the attitudes have certain "formal" features, such as prescribing universally). For example, suppose there were a community of speakers whose language by and large went smoothly into the English tongue and whose beliefs in general seemed reassuringly familiar, and yet who used a term, 'glim', which in all respects appeared to have the same expressive force as 'morally good' but which they readily applied only to those who demonstrated the physical strength and dexterity to crack a walnut in a bare fist. 'Morally good' would not, it seems, be a happy translation of 'glim' into English—what they are praising, finding admirable, and treating as action-guiding seems to be something other than a person's moral character. One way or another, a connection with certain things—for example, intrinsic concern with effects on human well-being, such as the avoidance of cruelty—seems as intimately a part of our moral usage as, say, universalizability.[114]

This would be a recipe for a potentially unstable "mixed view" of the meaning of moral terms if it combined a claim that possession of certain substantive properties (such as promotion of well-being) is logically sufficient for something to be good with a claim that (correctly) accepting that something is good logically requires endorsing it. For, if Foot is right, there will be no conceptually guaranteed connection between any particular substantive phenomena and such endorsement. Noncognitivists have sought to avoid this instability by insisting that whatever descriptive meaning might accrue to such terms, the prescriptive content is primary.[115] Foot takes the other tack, building the substantive conditions into the meaning of moral terms and ultimately denying that their purported "action-guidingness" is "automatic," claiming instead that it depends hypothetically upon the presence in the population of agents motivated to take the well-being of others seriously.[116] Yet aren't moral requirements categorical?

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[114]"One way or another. . . ." Indeed; but *which* way, of course, is the crux of the matter. Is it to be interpreted as a matter of *meaning* (analytic) or *doctrine* (synthetic), or are we doubtful about whether there is a fact of the matter? (See section 4, below.)

[115]See, for example, R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals.*

[116]See, especially, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives."

The existence of etiquette shows that norms can be nonhypo-
thetical without being categorically motivating: one can sincerely
and correctly judge that such requirements apply to oneself (for
example) without endorsing compliance or otherwise feeling mo-
tivated to comply. Morality, Foot reasoned, could be like that. If
morality is more important than etiquette, then the appropriate
explanation is that, to us, the promotion of human well-being and
the prevention of cruelty are more important than simply giving no
offense to conventional expectations. This would dispel the seem-
ing mystery surrounding moral assessment while enabling us to
understand how morality might have gotten off the ground—for
we can understand how it would be important for a community to
evolve and support practices and standards that tend to prevent
mutual cruelty and promote mutual well-being, standards that are
applied largely independently of (or even in the face of) the par-
ticular inclinations of the individuals on whom they are brought to
bear by the community, that are reflected at the level of individual
moral development in the stringency and priority of moral train-
ing, and that are by and large, though not perfectly, internalized.

Such a resolution of the problem of instability seems to do justice
to the uncontroversial components of the substantive content of
moral expressions in a way that noncognitivism does not. It also
might appear to fit better some of the evidence of common sense
concerning the somewhat spotty relation between moral evaluation
and motivation.[117] Of course, concepts such as cruelty and well-
being are not on their face strictly naturalistic. So perhaps the
uncontroversiality of the claim that morality is concerned with the
prevention of cruelty (for example) trades on a normatively

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[117]Compare William Frankena's remark that

> the record of human conduct is not such as to make it obvious that human
> beings always do have some tendency to do what they regard as their duty. The
> contention that our common moral consciousness supposes that there is no gap
> [between obligation and motivation] will be met by conflicting evidence. . . .
> ("Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy," 79)

See, also, his essays "Recent Conceptions of Moral Philosophy" and "Three
Questions about Morality," *Monist* 63 (1980): 3–68. Frankena distinguishes
the moral point of view in part substantively (as involving, for example, a
degree of intrinsic interest in the well-being of others). Over time, how-
ever, Frankena's views have become friendlier to internalism.

loaded, prescriptive reading of 'cruelty'. But Foot has argued quite generally that prescriptive readings devoid of primary descriptive content cannot do justice to our linguistic practices, at least in the case of evaluative expressions like 'a good *x*'. And it perhaps is plausible that the notion of well-being contains no normative component other than "a good life for the person who leads it"—in contrast, say, to the imperatival notions of obligation or duty. One might attempt an account of this normative component along Aristotelian lines, although a difficulty would arise: 'good' in its various evaluative uses typically is anchored by attachment to characteristic functions or roles—*a good pitch pipe, a good dentist*, and so on; Aristotelian theory would in principle permit one to carry this functionally anchored use forward into broader-ranging evaluations such as *a good life*, because Aristotle's underlying teleology affords to humans essential functions and roles; but this essentialist teleology is precisely the element of Aristotle's ethics that now seems least likely to be refurbished.[118] The *neo-*Aristotelian can reply that a cosmic teleology would be needed only if one sought to capture the idea of *a cosmically good life*. All that is needed for the idea of *a humanly good life* is the teleology inherent in the psychology of interest and desire, as realized in species-typical human beings. This latter view would nonetheless confront the familiar difficulties attending attempts to capture the normative in terms of the typical.[119]

Postpositivist nonreductionist. Accounts of ethics that are more self-consciously naturalistic have multiplied in recent years, encour-

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[118]Compare Bernard Williams's comment—in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*—that an Aristotelian ethical objectivism is the only sort that might work, though, in his view, even Aristotle fails to deploy his teleology effectively in securing the objective underwriting needed (44). We are making no claim here that this "functionalist" view of Aristotle's ethics is historically correct or adequate; we simply wish to note that one could be quite comfortable with a function-based naturalism for various evaluative uses of 'good' but still resist extending such an account to *a good human life*—perhaps because one cannot see one's way to a view about what a human life (as opposed to a pitch pipe or even a dentist) is *for*.

[119]See Moore, *Principia*, 44–45. A possible response, though one that might make the neo-Aristotelian position less distinct from a number of recent naturalisms, would be to introduce an idealization of the species-typical in order better to capture normativity, developing an account of *ideal-typical* human desires and interests.

aged in part by work in epistemology, philosophy of science, and philosophy of language.

One important group of continuity theories of this kind starts out from the claim that reflective equilibrium is the method of the sciences as well as ethics.[120] In both cases, use of this method in critically evaluating our beliefs is seen as inevitably involving some appeal both to the evidence of experience and to currently held substantive theory—for example, application of a principle of inference to the best explanation requires recourse to our going theory as well as experience in assessing the plausibility of competing explanatory claims. Thus, the fact that moral epistemology cannot dispense with an appeal to existing moral judgments or "intuitions," and can subject such judgments to criticism and revision only in broadly coherentist ways, does not show a fundamental difference or discontinuity between moral and scientific epistemology. Since, according to such views, we arrive at belief in the reality of moral properties as part of an inference to the best explanation of human conduct and its history, it has become a central issue for them whether so-called "moral explanations" are genuine—and good—explanations.

Harman has denied that *irreducible* moral properties could have a genuine explanatory role, but Nicholas Sturgeon, Richard Boyd, David Brink, and others have pursued analogies with natural and social science to argue that moral properties might be both irreducible and explanatorily efficacious.[121] One might, for example,

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[120]See Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations"; Richard Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," in *Moral Realism*, ed. G. Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); and David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[121]See Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, chaps. 1 and 2; Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations"; Harman, "Moral Explanations of Natural Facts—Can Moral Claims be Tested against Moral Reality?" and Sturgeon, "Harman on Moral Explanations of Natural Facts" and "What Difference Does It Make Whether Moral Realism Is True?" all in *Moral Realism: Proceedings of the 1985 Spindel Conference*, ed. N. Gillespie, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 4 (suppl.) (1986); Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*; and Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist." See, also, Richard Miller, "Reason and Commitment in the Social Sciences," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 8 (1979): 241–66, especially 252–55; and G. Sayre-McCord, "Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence," in G. Sayre-McCord, ed., *Moral Realism*.

argue that various chemical or biological "natural kinds"—acid, catalyst, gene, organism—are not obviously type-reducible to the natural kinds of physics, and yet play a role in good scientific explanations.

Moral properties might behave like natural kinds, on this view, because they might effect a theoretical unification of physiochemically and psychosociologically diverse phenomena in ways that would throw into relief common causal-explanatory roles: in light of the diverse physiochemical or psychosociological ways in which cruelty or injustice can be instantiated, there could be an illuminating unifying effect of explanations that successfully attribute various social or behavioral outcomes to cruelty or injustice. Like natural kinds, these moral properties would owe their explanatory capacity in part to their location within a constellation of law-governed—or at least counterfactual-supporting—properties that displays some structural or functional coherence.

For example, the notion of social justice might pick out an array of conditions that enhance the possibility of psychologically self-respecting and attractive individual lives while at the same time promoting social cooperation, stability, and prosperity. Such conditions would, in a sense, be mutually supporting. This would not suffice to secure any very strict form of internalism at the individual level, but it would help to explain how justice, and just social arrangements, might attract and retain public support, leading to the inculcation of norms of justice in individuals. And this in turn would help us to see how justice—or injustice—could have a causal-explanatory role.[122]

Of course, nonreductionists must supply a convincing answer to critics of the application of "inference to the *best* explanation" to the moral case, given the alleged availability of alternative, more minimal, and more obviously naturalistic explanations. It has, for example, been argued that supervenient properties should be ex-

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[122]Boyd has given the best-developed version of this view, according to which moral properties—like relevant natural kinds in science—pick out "homeostatic clusters." See his "How to Be a Moral Realist." Note that the sort of explanatory role under discussion could not be replaced without loss by explanations in terms of the beliefs about justice of those involved (as has been suggested by Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, 22)—for we can appeal to actual injustice to explain how these beliefs about injustice came about. On this point, see P. Railton, "Moral Realism," 192.

punged from good explanations, since the "real explanatory work" is being done by the supervenience base. However, this standard of "best explanation" seems unduly restrictive even for natural science, where theory development is not typically a minimalist enterprise and virtues such as depth, unification, and scope are also sought in explanations, and where there may emerge at a supervenient level lawlike regularities that seem genuinely to contribute to explanatory understanding. For example, explanations citing genes and natural selection afford a distinctive and worthwhile insight into the distribution of amino acids over the world's surface, even if this distribution could also be explained in purely physical terms, and even if the biological types are not (neatly) reducible to physical types, but merely supervene upon them. Since no standard account exists of what makes for "the best explanation," even in paradigm natural sciences, it is unlikely that definitive refutation—or vindication—of nonreductive naturalism will come from this quarter.

If moral properties are to be viewed as irreducible natural properties akin to natural kinds, then this sort of naturalism would run afoul of no Moorean argument: no *a priori* analysis is being offered, and full respect is being paid to Moore's Butlerian motto, "Everything is what it is, and not another thing."[123] It would perhaps seem extravagant to admit irreducible moral properties into the domain of natural properties if one did not allow, as the postposi-

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[123]See the epigram opposite the title page of *Principia*. One question that cannot be entered into in detail here is whether one can overcome various apparent obstacles to application of the semantics of natural kind terms to our evaluative vocabulary. On the view favored by postpositivist nonreductionists, natural kind terms function like proper names, contributing to propositions primarily by serving up a referent rather than providing an essential or identificatory description. According to this account, it is left to the course of science to provide us true descriptions that reveal the essence of the kind in question, and our linguistic usage shows this pattern of deference to theory and expertise, present and future. But our evaluative vocabulary seems to put its putative referents forward under a rather particular mode of presentation (see section 4), and patterns of deference in contemporary evaluative usage are, to say the least, less straightforward. (The normativity of conditions of idealization, discussed below in connection with reductionist accounts, might be one such pattern of deference— we tend to think our current moral or evaluative responses could be misguided in various ways if based upon ignorance, and tend to take our more informed responses as more authoritative, other things equal.)

tivists do, that moral natural properties supervene (in roughly the sense Moore seems to have had in mind)[124] upon nonmoral natural properties. However, one might wonder whether in this setting supervenience is genuinely distinct from (messy) reducibility. For these accounts operate at the level of properties, not concepts, and advance supervenience as a metaphysical, not normative, doctrine.[125] And supervenience between two seemingly disparate classes of properties is in some respects a quite strong and surprising relation; it is the kind of relation that would appear to call out for explanation. If the postpositivist held that nonmoral properties wholly and exclusively *constitute* moral properties, that would afford some explanation, but it would also make it more difficult to contrast such a view with some species of reductionism.

On the epistemological side, the nonreductionist naturalisms we have been considering must defend the view that reflective equilibrium is the method of natural science as well as ethics, and must explain the sense in which this method, despite its extensive use of intuition and nonconfirmatory desiderata of theory choice such as simplicity and explanatory coherence, genuinely warrants belief in the truth of its conclusions (since the postpositivists under discussion reject coherentism about truth). Now not all postpositivist nonreductionist naturalisms accept reflective equilibrium as an adequate account of justified claims in the sciences or ethics. Richard Miller, for example, insists that justification must involve a nontrivial claim that one's beliefs are the result of a reliable process for detection. Such a claim must itself be justified, on Miller's view, but regress is avoided by bringing such claims to ground in topic-specific principles that are part of the believer's framework, principles whose truth cannot be established by further, topic-neutral justifications. Such a procedure need not be merely self-congratulatory: it could turn out that the actual processes of belief

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[124]For Moore's view, see his "Reply to My Critics," 588.

[125]Normative theses of supervenience state *commitments concerning the invocation of certain concepts* rather than metaphysical relations among properties. For a noncognitivist, supervenience is a commitment to the effect that nothing can aptly be deemed good except in virtue of some nonnormative features it possesses; thus, if two things are judged different with respect to goodness, one is committed to finding them different in their nonnormative features as well. Theses of supervenience of this ilk carry no special metaphysical implications.

formation that we have employed in morality, say, are not as they would have to be in order to satisfy our fundamental principles concerning moral detection.[126]

Despite their differences, these nonreductionist views do face common opposition from those who question the granting of initial epistemic standing to irreducible moral beliefs, even when they happen to be *our* beliefs. Such criticism is usually countered by noting that theory development in general begins with according *prima facie* standing to some existing beliefs—and indeed there seems to be scant alternative. But critics will reply by citing many differences in the actual *accomplishments* of theory development in science as opposed to ethics, differences that might be thought to cast light back on the reasonableness of the original supposition of epistemic standing. Just as, in the case of religion, it has eventually come to count against the reasonableness of taking "religious ex- perience" as possessing *prima facie* epistemic standing that religious theory has proven so persistently controversial and unreliable in its claims about the details of nature and history, so might it be held that the lack of consensus and accomplishment in ethics counts against what would otherwise be a reasonable willingness to assign *prima facie* epistemic weight to moral beliefs. There would of course be little left of ethics, or ethical inquiry, as a cognitive domain were no initial weight given to going moral beliefs; but critics might not find this skeptical result wholly uncongenial.

An effective reply to such critics would involve giving an expla- nation of moral controversy that competes favorably with the skep- tical alternative and, more importantly, would involve developing nonreductionist ethical theory itself, showing it to have (or to make possible) some worthwhile theoretical accomplishments. Accom- plishing this task would involve articulating the connections be- tween *sui generis* moral or evaluative properties, on the one hand, and judgment, motivation, behavior, and other elements of social or psychological theory, on the other, in ways adequate both to illustrate the explanatory gains secured by appeal to such proper-

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[126]See R. Miller, "Ways of Moral Learning," *Philosophical Review* 94 (1985): 507–56, and *Fact and Method: Explanation, Confirmation, and Reality in the Natural and Social Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

ties and to explicate (and in some suitable sense capture) their normativity.[127]

Reductionist. A more direct, but also riskier, way of attempting to answer a number of the questions raised above—about normativity, about which explanations "do all the work," about epistemic standing, and about supervenience—is to pursue reductionism. Reductionist proposals with regard to moral rightness or nonmoral good have in recent years been broached by, among others, Richard Brandt, Gilbert Harman, Peter Railton, and David Lewis.[128] The reduction might be in the form of a putative analytic truth (of a kind more complex than any envisaged by Moore), a reforming definition, or a synthetic identity statement.[129] By exhibiting which *bona fide* natural properties value discourse can be construed as

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[127]For example, appeal to homeostatic equilibria will not afford an approach to explanation or normativity for those areas where severe or contentious trade-offs are inevitable. It is open to the postpositivist nonreductionist either to show how some suitable internalist constraint can be met, or to show why internalism is the wrong account of normativity (even while explaining how it has seemed to many philosophers obviously right).

[128]See R. B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*; G. Harman, "Moral Explanations of Natural Facts," 66–67 and *The Nature of Morality*, 125–136; P. Railton, "Moral Realism," "Facts and Values," and "Naturalism and Prescriptivity"; and D. Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 63 (suppl.) (1989). John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice* (secs. 60–63), offers an account of nonmoral good that shows many affinities with those just mentioned, and he cites a long list of historical and contemporary antecedents. Some of the accounts mentioned above are of moral rightness, others of nonmoral value. For convenience, though at some cost to accuracy and coherence, in what follows we will often speak simply of "value" to cover both.

[129]Reservations expressed above (note 123) about employing a natural kinds semantics for evaluative vocabulary remain in force. For an example of a semantics based upon complex analytic truth, see D. Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value." The "putative analytic truth" escapes Moorean refutation by showing that the reduction "scores best" in an overall account of the meaning of the terms, where it is part of the meaning of terms that they apply to whatever fits their associated truisms, or does so near enough. The proposal would identify that which "best deserves" the name 'value', say, and then note that it comes quite close to that which would "perfectly deserve" the name. See also Lewis, "Score-keeping in a Language Game," reprinted in *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). How genuine a difference exists among these three approaches—via putative analytic truth, reforming definition, or synthetic property identity? Functionally, at any rate, they may come to much the same thing when fully developed and suitably hedged.

being about, it is possible to exploit the features of these properties to answer questions about the motivational or normative force of evaluation, to give an unmysterious account of the epistemology of value, and to account for the supervenience of value.[130]

Depending upon the nature of the reduction, it might turn out that relativism about value or morality is vindicated (Brandt, Harman, Lewis)[131] or not (Railton).[132] Moreover, all of these accounts are dispositional in the sense that they make matters of value depend upon the affective dispositions of agents. Most, though not all, seek to capture the component of normativity that consists in the possibility of criticizing our existing affective dispositions by providing for some sort of *idealization* of the familiar epistemology that underwrites so much of our evaluative discourse. The criticism of our desires and ends typically proceeds by, for example, asking whether satisfying them would interfere with other ends, or showing that we have misconceived their origins or objects, or convincing us that, if we knew what it would be like to satisfy them, we would no longer want to be guided by them, and so on. More generally, we believe that one knows better what one's good is, or what is right, the more comprehensive or vivid one's awareness of

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[130]The account of supervenience is not, perhaps, *a priori*, since it may rely upon a principle such as "same cause, same effect." Critics of reductionist accounts have argued that the supervenience of the moral upon the nonmoral is a conceptual matter. See, for example, S. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* and Mark Johnston, "Dispositional Theories of Value." However, if we think of value as given by what we are *stably* disposed to want to want, say, then it will follow *a priori* that nothing could be a value unless the dispositions exhibited the requisite stability. In any event, it perhaps is in the normative rather than metaphysical form that supervenience is *a priori*, and the reductionist is not blocked from viewing supervenience in this sense as one of the normative commitments that come with *use* of moral language.

[131]For the moral case, see Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, chap. 10; and Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended," *Philosophical Review* 84 (1975): 3–22, "Relativistic Ethics: Morality as Politics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 3 (1978): 109–21, and "Is There a Single True Morality?" in *Morality, Reason, and Truth.* For the case of nonmoral intrinsic value, see Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value."

[132]For the case of intrinsic nonmoral good, the account is relational, rather than relativistic; see Railton, "Facts and Values," 10ff. Contrast Lewis's relativistic use of the second-person plural in "Dispositional Theories of Value," 132ff. For an example of nonrelativism about the moral case, see Railton, "Moral Realism," sec. 4.

what living out various possibilities would be like for oneself, or for all affected, a view whose ancestry reaches back to Hume on taste, Mill on utility, and, more recently, Firth on the "Ideal Observer."[133] The component of normativity that consists in "action-guidingness" is, in turn, sought by appeal to the motivational force of our affective dispositions (again, perhaps as they are when our circumstances are in certain ways improved or idealized—since motivation when benighted might not be *normative* for us), and including perhaps characteristic desires to see our values or choices as defensible, or to make them part of a coherent and effective life.[134]

These views locate the ultimate ground of normativity in the affective dispositions of agents, and this immediately raises the question whether suitable "objectivity" can be secured for ethics by such reductive naturalisms. If it is essential to the genuineness of value or moral judgments that they not be relational in certain ways—not be tied, for example, to contingent dispositions of creatures like us to be drawn to some things rather than others—then a validation as "objective" would not be forthcoming from the reduction. We will have something better described as "subjectivity objectified" than as objectivity *tout court*. Yet it may be a strength of "idealized response" views that there seems nothing for value to be,

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[133]D. Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," reprinted in *Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays*, ed. J. W. Lenz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965); J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), chap. 4; R. Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12 (1952): 317–45.

[134]On the various actual desires engaged by idealized-desire accounts of intrinsic nonmoral value, see Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, chap. 8, and Railton, "Facts and Values," 14–17. It is important to notice the diversity of positions available here. Harman, in *The Nature of Morality*, claims that 'ought' judgments cannot sensibly be applied to individuals who are not motivated to comply. The result is a kind of internalism about 'ought' judgments—as distinguished from judgments about what is, from a moral point of view, better or worse. By contrast, Brandt and Railton insist upon a kind of internalism for judgments of intrinsic nonmoral good, and make concessions to the externalist conception of obligation that Harman means to exclude. Harman, in "Moral Relativism Defended" and "Relativistic Ethics: Morality as Politics," seems concerned with actual, nonidealized motivations (though compare his "ideal reasoner" naturalistic account of reasons in *The Nature of Morality*), whereas Brandt is concerned with what moral code one would support in idealized circumstances.

on deepest reflection, wholly apart from what moves, or could move, valuers—agents for whom something can matter. Indeed, one way to defend idealized response views (naturalistic or otherwise) is to observe that there appears to be no alternative in critical discussion of value to a process of asking how things might strike us on reflection. It would, accordingly, be an intolerably reified conception of value or morality to insist that "objective" value must be "absolute" in the sense of possessing independence from all facts about motivation (even, should there be such a thing, "rational motivation").[135]

But even if the specter of absolute value can be laid to rest, and even if such accounts can avoid direct collision with the open question argument in virtue of advancing their claims via reforming definitions, property identities, or non-obvious analytic equivalences, they nonetheless cannot avoid eventual confrontation with something very much like the open question argument. With regard to whatever explication they offer of good in terms of some (possibly complex) property P, it still seems coherent to ask, "Yes, I see that x is P, but isn't there still room for me to wonder whether x is genuinely good, whether I ought to regulate my life accordingly?" This question's intelligibility appears to call for some meaning of 'good' other than the reductionist proposal. Even reductionist proposals set forward as reforming definitions face a similar challenge, since they purport to provide an account of 'good', say, that gives it a clear meaning but also enables us to pose all the significant questions that the pre-reformed term permitted.[136] Yet isn't the question "Yes, I see that x is P, but isn't there still room for me to wonder . . . ?" a significant one? And how could we use the reformed term to state it?

Reductionists will have to convince us better than they have that their proposals make this question less than pressing, at least with

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[135]Note that there can be "idealized response" views that do not presuppose all moral motivation to be liable to independent characterization such as a reductive naturalist seeks. Such views might be realist, and they would share with the naturalistic view under discussion a criticism of "absolute value" as incoherent. See, for example, Mark Johnston, "Dispositional Theories of Value."

[136]On reforming definitions, see, for example, Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, chap. 1.

respect to, say, a persons's own good. (It need not be the ambition of an account of nonmoral good to tell us *how to lead our lives*, for example, in cases where morality, or friendship, or aesthetics point in ways other than toward promotion of one's own good.)[137] Of course, none of the naturalistic reductionist proposals are free of revisionism, and so none could possibly fit all aspects of English usage. We probably do not suppose that our intuitive notions of value or rightness are free of confusion or ambiguity, and so can hardly expect that any philosophical account of them that is not itself confused and ambiguous will have just the right intuitive "fit."

In this area as in many others, intellectual developments may lead us to a view that differs from common sense, and yet helps us both to understand what common sense does believe, and to correct it in certain ways, consistent with preserving core elements of the function of common sense—whether the area be explanation of the natural world or evaluation of the human world. Even so, the fact that these accounts seem inevitably to be led from some fairly uncontroversial repudiation of reification to some much more controversial account of the conditions of idealization, or of the relation of idealization to actual motivation, indicates the depth of the problems they face—whether they are proposed as linguistic analyses or as reforming definitions.

Questions of revisionism and controversy also inevitably bring us back to the issue of the contestability of questions of morality and value. Reductionist accounts can explain the difficulty in resolving conflicts over these questions in various ways: the intense and inevitable involvement of competing interests; the apparent plurality of values and lack of determinacy about assessment and trade-offs;[138] the inherent complexity of the issues, and the relatively

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[137]Indeed, even an account of moral rightness need not have the ambition of "deciding for us" what place moral considerations will have in our deliberations. Compare here Mill's distinguishing of the moral, aesthetic, and sympathetic "modes of viewing," in his essay on Bentham, reprinted in J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, ed. M. Warnock (New York: Meridian, 1962), 121f. Mill thought the moral point of view ought to be "paramount," though one can accept his distinctions without—or without always—accepting this further claim.

[138]It need not be an obstacle to realism about value, or to the continuity thesis, that value's boundaries or magnitudes might involve some vague-

underdeveloped state of both of social and psychological theory and of moral theory and theory of value; and so on.[139] But even if such explanations are granted some standing, they may seem to fall well short of taking full measure of the depth of contestability and the issues it raises.

Questions of revisionism and controversy also inevitably bring us back to issues about how a reductionist account might claim to capture the "peculiar connection to action" of morality. Can an account that makes moral motivation other than rationally mandatory yield an adequate explanation—one that is at most tolerably revisionist—of the phenomena of moral experience or of the seeming truisms of commonsense moral thought? Perhaps such features of our ordinary conception of morality as the nonhypothetical scope and content of moral requirements, which the idea of automatic rational authority has been invoked to explain, can be otherwise accommodated, or shown to be less central or indispensible to commonsense moral thought than Kantians have imagined. But reductionists have not gone far in showing any such thing; despite

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ness or indeterminacy. Consider, for comparison, the question, What is the surface area of Iceland? Do we take the coastline at high or low water, neap or spring tide? How short a "measuring stick" do we use to gauge the coastline's edge? And so on. Iceland's surface area may be indeterminate in these respects, but it also is determinate enough to be clearly greater than Tobago's and less than Great Britain's. The thesis that ethics or value theory is substantively or methodologically continuous with empirical inquiry would hardly be in grave peril if, for example, value turned out to be "no more determinate than the surface area of Iceland." The real difficulty in the case of value is not with vagueness or indeterminacy as such, but with our unhappiness at the idea of resolving vagueness or indeterminacy via any sort of linguistic reform of regimentation. Cartographers may be happy to adopt conventions to resolve indeterminacy about surface area, but merely conventional resolutions seem inappropriate in the case of value: owing to the connection between value and action, such resolutions may strike us as substantive in a way that begs controversial questions about how to live. How we should respond theoretically or practically to this situation is, of course, a central question. One theoretical response would be to show that a purported reduction of value preserves whatever indeterminacy survives critical reflection.

[139]These same considerations suggest that some areas of morality and value should be less controversial than others. A plausible reductionist account should help us to explain which are which. For relevant discussion, see Railton, "Moral Realism," 197–200.

their protestations, they might turn out to be error theorists after all.

3. MODERN MORALITY, MODERN MORAL THEORY

Even the most abbreviated account of recent developments in ethics must record the strenuous criticisms some modern philosophers writing on morality have lodged against modern moral philosophy, and, at times, against modern morality itself.[140]

There surely is a sense in which contemporary "Western" society finds itself without a sufficiently rich shared cosmology or theology, or a sufficiently rich constellation of vigorous, uncontroversial, and unselfconscious collective practices, to be able to escape a certain anxiety about morality, or to be able to articulate crucial moral questions without reaching for a high level of abstraction or generality, a level that seems at times unrelated to the conditions and motivations characteristic of actual lives and their particular sources of interest. Given the diversity of large societies, the tenuousness of many of the connections that bind together their members, the pressures toward rationalization exerted by large and seemingly inevitable institutions, and the universalist aspiration of modern thought in general, there may be little for philosophers out of sympathy with modern morality and modern moral philosophy to do but bemoan this condition. Indeed, discomforted philosophers have typically claimed to find modern philosophy in general to be unhelpful in this predicament—either because, as a child of secular, rationalizing, universalizing impulses itself, it is part of

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[140]See E. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"; P. Foot, "Virtues and Vices"; Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); M. Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," and *Plural and Conflicting Values* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*; A Baier, "Theory and Reflective Practices" and "Doing Without Moral Theory?" reprinted in *Postures of Mind* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); James Wallace, *Moral Relevance and Moral Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Stanley G. Clarke and Evan Simpson, eds., *Anti-Theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

the problem, or because it simply lacks the kind of insight necessary to diagnose the real problems besetting morality and moral philosophy or the kind of power sufficient to affect these problems' real causes.

For the most part, criticisms of morality and moral theory have been set out in bold outline, in somewhat deliberate defiance of the complexities of history, society, and philosophy. So there is no end of possible rejoinders to such critiques of the mincing, "yes, but . . ." form. Certainly this is not the place to present these critiques of morality and moral theory more fully or to ask how much of their force would remain were they made more responsive to the historical record and more nuanced philosophically. However, since we have been up to our necks in moral theory in this essay, it behooves us to make some general sort of reply to these critiques, even if it must be much more schematic than the criticisms themselves.

One can discern at least two aspects of modern moral theory—as opposed to modern morality proper—that have especially been called into question: normative theory (the effort to bring some system or unity to the multiplicity of particular moral assessments and commonsense moral principles by developing—some might say discovering—a highly general set of normative principles or procedures to organize them) and metatheory (understood broadly as the effort to develop—or discover—a systematic understanding of what morality is, or purports to be). Let us take these up in order.

This essay has had little to say about normative theory in its own right.[141] Those who write in a critical vein about normative theory as an enterprise typically find themselves somewhat torn. Existing moral conceptions are, after all, the product of diverse historical forces, and it would be surprising indeed for them to fall into one neat pattern, as perhaps Kantian or utilitarian normative theories might seem to claim. Yet one cannot without qualm call for "fidelity to existing conceptions in all their particularity" as an alternative.

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[141]Annette Baier has usefully identified the goal of developing a normative theory as the best-defined target for a range of criticisms often leveled at "moral theory" without qualification. See her "Doing Without Moral Theory?"

Not only are "existing conceptions" in flux, but it would also appear that we owe much of what seems most admirable in modern societies—movements for political democracy and universal suffrage, for the emancipation of slaves and women, for the elimination of racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination, for universal social provision of basic needs, and for international law and human rights—in significant measure to universalizing and generalizing pressures that have precisely gone against the grain of some entrenched (and still powerful) particularistic moral conceptions and individual or group commitments. One might hope for a better reconciliation of universalizing ethics and the particularity of individual lives and communities than either Kantian or utilitarian normative theories have thus far effected. More dramatically, one might insist that this "better reconciliation" will yield something that looks less like a *theory* than either Kantianism or utilitarianism. But pronouncing on this latter question would seem to us premature, given the remarkable development of Kantian and utilitarian theories in recent decades and the fact that some alternative theories, such as hybrid theories and ethics of virtue, have only begun to receive sustained discussion.[142]

About metatheorizing, critics typically manifest a different kind of ambivalence. It is less that they admire the effects of some of its well-known products than that they find themselves hard-working practitioners of the trade. Alisdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*, devotes substantial effort to a philosophical investigation of the con-

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[142]Among the interesting recent works in a broadly Kantian tradition that might have more to say about particularity are Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical," and Scanlon, "Contractualism and Utilitarianism"; within the utilitarian tradition, recent approaches that may make more room for various sorts of social or individual particularity include David Lyons, "Human Rights and the General Welfare," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6 (1977): 113–29, and Michael Slote, *Common-sense Morality and Consequentialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985). A hybrid theory is discussed in S. Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*. See also W. K. Frankena's "mixed deontological theory," in his *Ethics*, 2d. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 43–54. Some advocates of virtue-based approaches to ethics have seen this as part of a movement against normative theorizing; yet one could very well think that a plausible virtue-based approach will call for a normative theory of the various virtues.

ceptual presuppositions of morality and to a discussion of the adequacy of noncognitivism as a theory of the meaning of moral terms.[143] And Bernard Williams, in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, defines 'ethical theory' in a way that exempts a systematic attempt to explain what is going on in moral language and thought—including an attempt to "place" ethics with respect to scientific inquiry—if it implies that a given "test" of normative correctness *sometimes* (but not always or never) applies; that is, he defines the term in a way that exempts his own quite interesting metatheorizing.[144] Unable as we are to locate any deep distinction between the sorts of investigations we have been carrying out and those pursued by *les théoriciens malgré eux*, we prefer to see our efforts as animated by a common desire to understand morality, its preconditions, and its prospects, however much our substantive conclusions might differ from theirs.

4. IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

Metaethics as revived today differs in a number of ways from metaethics during its analytic heyday, but no difference is more striking than the multiplicity of now active positions and questions. No view currently enjoys the predominance noncognitivism once did, and questions about meaning have been forced to make room for a range of metaphysical, epistemological, and practical questions as well. Such philosophical progress as has been made in metaethics has come not from simplifying the debate or reducing the number of viable alternatives, but from bringing greater sophistication to the discussion of well-known positions and from exploring heretofore disregarded possibilities and interconnections. Indeed, debate has now extended even to the metaphilosophical level, as philosophers have asked with increasing force and urgency whether, or in what ways, theorizing is appropriate to morality. Since there appears to be no immediate danger of things

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[143]See *After Virtue*, especially chaps. 2–5. Cf. also W. K. Frankena's review essay, "MacIntyre and Modern Morality," *Ethics* 93 (1983): 579–87, especially 582–83.

[144]See *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 72. Moreover, it may be unclear whether one has a single, relativistic test, or multiple, relative tests.

returning to a staid consensus, we will end by making a few observations without attempting anything so grand as a conclusion. Somewhat preversely, perhaps, our observations will be concerned in part with whether some of the distinctions upon which current debates have fastened may be of less ultimate significance, or (more respectfully) of much greater subtlety, than they now appear. Here follow six examples, not all quite in dead earnest, of areas where genuine issues exist, but where current debates have exaggerated contrasts for effect, somewhat masking the issues themselves.

(1) A contemporary noncognitivist, still impressed that the open question argument reveals something about the meaning of moral terms, might claim that a naturalistic realism about ethics or value founded on reforming definitions or property identities should not be seen as really in competition with his view. The noncognitivist aims to capture (something roughly equivalent to) the senses expressed by our evaluative terms, made evident by the possibility of using the words 'good', 'right', to conduct meaningful debate over competing naturalistic views. The word 'good', for example, is used to bring something—quite possibly a naturalistic something—forward in a certain mode of presentation, *as* evaluatively appropriate. The naturalistic realist may by contrast see herself as aiming to locate those properties that discourse about goodness can—or could within the limits of tolerable revisionism, or should when we have cleared away various confusions—be construed as tracking, or as settling upon as we grow in knowledge and experience. Something like a division of labor between sense and reference might therefore be in the offing—made possible in part by the fact that the "sense" which the noncognitivist assigns to the moral vocabulary is expressive, and so *a fortiori* not logically reference-fixing. To adapt a Moorean distinction: the noncognitivist is seeking the concept "Good" while the naturalistic cognitivist is seeking "good-making features"; and the latter may stand in a metaphysical, or nomological, or practical—without insisting upon a logical or conceptual—relation to the attitude 'good' expresses. The noncognitivist thus can say what he wants to say about the peculiar, dynamic function of evaluative or moral vocabulary, and the naturalist can say what she wants to say about what makes something good, or right, and why these are "hard facts."

Those impressed by Quine's critique of analyticity or by the Wittgensteinian dictum that "meaning is use" may find this way of

dividing things up altogether too nice. We might well agree when-
ever the pattern of use of 'good' or 'right' shows wide consensus on
the good- or right-making features. Post-Quine and post-
Wittgenstein, the distinction between the concept "Good" and
"good-making features," between subject matter and doctrine, may
thus be seen to be negotiable, though not in just any way one
pleases. To the extent that certain good-making features are tru-
istically so, or certain substantive constraints on dialectical uses of
'good' such that they cannot be violated by speakers without gross
anomaly, these features or constraints lay claim to be part of the
meaning of 'good' that competent speakers acquire.[145] Where dis-
agreement persists, however, or even seems sensible (as reflected in
the possibility of a nongratuitous open question argument), the
noncognitivist can plausibly urge that there is a point in trying to
capture a distinctive sense of evaluative terms that enables us to
understand how the competing accounts could be expressing con-
tending views on something held constant and in common. Pre-
sumably, the noncognitivist's claim will be strongest for those terms
of most general evaluation—'good', 'right', 'rational'—although all
of these appear to have some substance, and so are unlikely to be
purely expressive. Is anything left? Just the all-important, all-
inclusive, almost certainly not substantive, seemingly endlessly con-
tentious, but plainly action-guiding phrase 'the thing to do'.

Of course, our speculation here is over-simple. Suffice it to say
that the relation between a noncognitivist and a naturalistic cogni-
tivist could stand some rethinking, perhaps more along the lines of
a dynamic oligopoly than over-ambitious efforts toward static mo-
nopoly.

(2) Despite the tendency of holders of various views to brand
competitors as revisionist, the term cannot be a definitive criticism
since virtually every participant in contemporary metaethical de-
bates is willing to entertain some or other degree of revisionism.
Noncognitivists try to conserve certain practical aspects of ordinary
moral discourse, but perhaps at the expense of semantic revision-

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[145]Of course, we may for various purposes also find it helpful to distin-
guish broader versus narrower senses of a term. Compare Stevenson's
distinction between "first" and "second pattern" analyses of normative
language, in *Ethics and Language*, chap. 4.

ism and of rejection of the claims of existence internalism.[146] Kantians also try to conserve features of the practical realm, though in a form that may not capture some of the motivational point of judgment internalism. Moreover, their account of reasons for action, though originating in an appeal to commonsense morality, may go beyond anything actually contained in common sense. As a result, they may find themselves facing an unwanted need to reject important elements of commonsense morality in order to insure the required connection to appropriate reasons for action. Naturalists may be prepared to accept some revision in the matter of practicality (at least as neo-Kantian philosophers have conceived it) in order to incur less revision in recognized moral substance. Since we can hardly single out any particular position with the charge of "revisionism of moral common sense," the real issues concern the balances that are struck between revisionism and conservatism, and what purposes a revision can or should serve.

Similarly, the distinction between revisionist accounts and error theories is itself a subtle matter, and may have to do with two little-understood questions: Would the best philosophical clarification of the nature of morality lead us to accept or reject morality so characterized? And, what metaethical relevance does such a "critical reflection" test have?

(3) Although the debate over internalism versus externalism remains central to understanding the divisions in ethical theory, there is no uncontroversial understanding of how much internalism, and what sort of internalism, commonsense or reflective morality requires. Indeed, most views embody internalism at some point, so that all-purpose attacks on "externalism" too often are set pieces. Another set piece debate contrasts corresponding internalist and externalist views with respect to how much they are prepared to leave to contingency. An externalist, for example, typically seeks a contingent or nomological connection between moral

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[146]For the distinction between *judgment internalism* and *existence internalism*, see S. Darwall, *Impartial Reason*, 54–55. Existence internalism may have been the more important form in shaping the historical evolution of ethics from Hume (and perhaps before) to Kant and Kantianism, although elements of judgment internalism can also be found in Hume. For a related distinction, see D. Brink, *Moral Realism*, on "agent" versus "appraiser internalism" (40).

judgment or moral obligation and motivation, while an internalist insists that the connection is necessary or conceptual. But any appearance that internalists leave less to contingency is misleading. The more conceptual pre-commitments are built into notions such as agency, morality, and reason, the more chancy it becomes whether we humans possess agency, a morality, or reasons.

(4) Now that Platonic ethical intuitionism has lost its following, the distinctions among forms of moral "realism," "constructivism," "quasi-realism," and so on can no longer be understood as turning upon commitment to (or rejection of) a domain of moral facts "independent of human capacities and interests." Moral realists, constructivists, and quasi-realists alike look to the responses and reasons of persons, rather than some self-subsistent realm, to ground moral practice. Such claims are complicated by the fact that "realism" itself bears no agreed-upon significance, that the role or nature of a theory of truth is so much in dispute in philosophy generally, and that "constructivism" as it now stands seems still to embody non-"constructed" normative notions of rationality or reasonableness. It will be some time before these issues are sorted out, and their significance, such as it might be, firmly identified.

(5) There have been, running more or less simultaneously but without notable mutual regard, at least two seemingly independent debates about the justification of morality. The first debate has focused on such matters as the nature of morality, and the objectivity (or lack of it) of the reasons it offers for action. The second debate has focused on the question, Why be moral?, taking the content of morality as given (e.g., by common sense) and requiring that any satisfactory answer show that individuals enjoy advantages for conducting themselves in accord with moral demands. Yet it has become increasingly difficult to see how these two debates might be kept apart, in some measure because the conditions under which the question, Why be moral?, is asked are often restricted or idealized—and not inappropriately, since some otherwise quite impressive ways of making morality advantageous (such as devising a reliable scheme of coercion) are thought to be beside the point. The question of what we are asking for when we seek a rational justification for morality, and what would count as an answer, remains as urgent as ever.

(6) The increasing criticism of ethical theory has itself largely been based upon a theoretical understanding of ethics, or of how

ethics differs from other areas of inquiry. Often these criticisms therefore seem less to be suggesting how we might content our-selves with less by way of ethical theory, than to be suggesting how ethical theorizing might be improved, either by adding variables or complexity or (theoretically motivated and systematic) relativity at the normative level, or by altering some of our views (again, for theoretically motivated and systematic reasons) about what must be done in order to "place" ethics satisfactorily.

As contemporary metaethics moves ahead and positions gain in sophistication and complexity, victories, or even clear advantages, may become harder to achieve or consolidate. That is a kind of progress, but only if a clearer articulation of the surviving issues emerges as a result.

Finally, in the effervescent discussion of the desirability of moral theory, various camps express agreement that more careful and empirically informed work on the nature or history or function of morality is needed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, very little such work has been done even by some of those who have recommended it most firmly.[147] Too many moral philosophers and commentators on moral philosophy—we do not exempt ourselves—have been

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[147]There are some exceptions. Empirical psychology plays an important role in Brandt's *Theory of the Good and the Right*, and others have paid significant attention to psychology and social theory in their work; see, for example, Lawrence Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (London: Rout-ledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); Richard Miller, "Ways of Moral Learning"; Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Real-ism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), and some of the essays in Owen Flanagan and Amelie Rorty, eds., *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, Bradford Books, 1990). We should not suppose, however, that there is a well-developed literature in the social sciences simply awaiting philosophical discovery and exploitation. Social psychologists, for example, can be heard to complain that, apart from certain phenomena of moral development, little empirical work has been done on moral deliberation and decision. For examples of some preliminary experiments involving "framing effects" on relatively mature judgments of prudence and fairness—experiments that might be seen as affording philosophers a caution against over-ready reliance on moral intuitions—see A. Tversky and D. Kahneman, "Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions," and D. Kahneman, J. L. Knetsch, and R. H. Thaler, "Fairness and the Assumptions of Economics," both in *The Journal of Business* 59 (1986): 251–78 and 285–300, respectively. Issues about the role of personality, emotions, identity, and self-concept in deliberation have also begun to receive increasing attention.

content to invent their psychology or anthropology from scratch and do their history on the strength of selective reading of texts rather than more comprehensive research into contexts. Change is underway in this regard, especially, perhaps, in the emergence of less ahistorical approaches to the history of philosophy. But any real revolution in ethics stemming from the infusion of a more empirically informed understanding of psychology, anthropology, or history must hurry if it is to arrive in time to be part of *fin de siècle* ethics.

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