The Normative Stance
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The *Duhem-Quine thesis* (Duhem, 1906; Quine, 1951; Harding, 1976) famously holds that a single hypothesis cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed in isolation, but instead only in conjunction with other background hypotheses. This article argues that this has important and underappreciated implications for meta-ethics. Section I argues that if one begins meta-ethical theorizing with a naturalistic worldview, then normativity (including normative moral reasons) will appear to be reducible to a set of psycho-semantic behaviors that, following Dennett's work on 'the intentional stance', I call *the normative stance*.[1] Section II then addresses potential objections by normative non-naturalists, showing that these objections are unlikely to appeal to naturalists given the latter's background commitments. I conclude that naturalists should find the normative stance to be a promising theory of normativity, and that to determine whether it is a true theory, we must ascertain which background hypotheses, naturalistic or otherwise, we should have when doing meta-ethics.

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[1] Readers may wonder whether Dennett already pursued this in 'the personal stance', which he terms a 'truly moral stance toward [an intentional] system' (Dennett, 1971, p. 240; Cf. Rovane, 1994), as well as how my project differs from moral projectivism (Blackburn, 1984; Joyce, 2016). The normative stance is both more general and more specific than either of the above. First, it is more general in holding that all normativity—not just moral normativity, but also aesthetic, instrumental, and other forms of normativity—are 'projected' into the world. Second, it is more specific than moral projectivism and the personal stance in that the normative stance reduces normativity to a specific set of psychosemantic behaviors (viz. defining the truth-conditions and truthmakers of normative propositions) not posited by either of the above. Third, the normative stance is more general than moral projectivism in its commitments. Joyce (2009, p. 56) distinguishes several forms of moral projectivism, noting that they are all at least minimally committed to two ideas: (1) that we experience moral facts as objective features of the world, and (2) this experience has its origin in some non-perceptual faculty. Although we will see that the normative stance can explain experiences of 'moral objectivity' as a kind of cognitive illusion resulting from psychological dispositions to *take the stance* that moral facts are objective, it does not presuppose that we all do experience moral facts as objective features of the world—which is a good thing, since this is controversial (see Harman, 2000; Velleman, 2013; Beebe and Sackris, 2016).

I. From Naturalism to Stance-Explanations

In *The Intentional Stance*, Daniel Dennett asserts that his inquiry into the nature of intentionality is based upon a 'tactical choice': an assumption that *naturalism is correct* (Dennett, 1987, pp. 4-5). Dennett's choice to begin with this assumption appears to be based on the relative epistemic advantages of empirical methods and fruitfulness of scientific inquiry, in contrast to armchair reflection or strong forms of deference to 'commonsense' (Dennett, 1987, pp. 2-11), which have a much more checkered track record (see Russell, 1945, p. xiii; Brennan 2010; Dietrich, 2011; Slezak, 2018)—a meta-philosophical orientation that I have also defended elsewhere (Arvan, 2016, ch. 1). Dennett then notes that intentionality has seemed mysterious because philosophers have supposed that intentional states—desires, beliefs, hopes, and so on—must be something like 'sentences' in people's minds or brains that somehow come to be 'about' other things (Dennett, 1987, p. 14). However, Dennett then argues that once we adopt a naturalistic starting point, intentionality appears less mysterious. We can see that all of our talk about beliefs and desires being 'about' or 'referring' to things is just that: a way of *talking* and explaining human behavior. He writes,

> Consider first how we go about populating each other's heads with beliefs...one rule for attributing beliefs...is this: attribute as beliefs all the truths relevant to the system's interests (or desires) that the system's experience to date has made available...

> Note that this rule is a derived rule, an elaboration and further specification of the fundamental rule: attribute those beliefs the system *ought* to have. Note also that this rule interacts with the attribution of desires. How do we attribute desires

(preferences, goals, interests) on whose basis we will shape the list of beliefs? We attribute the desires the system *ought* to have (Dennett, 1987, pp. 18-20).

The intentional stance, in other words, aims to explain intentionality in terms of our *ascribing* beliefs, desires, and other intentional states to people, 'populating their heads' with these states in to explain their actions (i.e. we explain why Jones does this or that by ascribing to him various intentional states). For Dennett, then, intentionality is reducible to a kind of practice: a practice of *taking the stance* that things in the world (principally, but not only, people) have intentional states (e.g. beliefs, desires, hopes, etc.)—which we do, again, as a practical method for explaining their behavior.

Let us now apply the same tactical starting point—the assumption of naturalism—to normativity: that is, to explaining the nature of 'normative reasons', including normative moral reasons. If we assume naturalism, can a similar 'stance-strategy' explain everything that needs to be explained about normativity? In particular, can such a strategy bridge the famous 'is-ought gap' and avoid the 'naturalistic fallacy'? Following Hume (1738, p. 335), the prevailing philosophical view today seems to be that one cannot validly derive *any* normative proposition ('oughts') merely from descriptive, naturalistic propositions concerning what is (see Ridge, 2018, §1). Moore (1903) goes even further, arguing that it is always fallacious to attempt to reduce the good to any natural property or set of such properties (such as what is desired or pleasant). In reply, a number of theorists have purported to provide 'Humean reductions' of the normative to the natural (Jackson, 1998; MacIntyre, pp. 148-50; Arvan, 2016, pp. 28-29; Arvan, 2020, p. 127). For example, Schroeder (2005, p. 10) argues that the good 'reduces to the constitutive *parts* of the property of *contributing to overall happiness*.' However, one recalcitrant objection is that any such attempted reduction of the normative

to the natural will either appeal to normative properties as a premise (e.g. it being *good* to contribute to overall happiness), in which case there is no real reduction of the normative to non-normative; or, alternatively, the proposed reduction will only appeal to only *non-normative* (i.e. natural) properties, in which case it looks like the normative is eliminated from our ontology in favor of purely non-normative phenomena (Fleming, 2015, p. 244; Enoch, 2007, p. 44). For example, Bedke (2012, p. 111) argues:

> [T]o ensure that natural ontology suffices for normative truth, there must be semantically grounded entailments from the natural truths to the normative truths. There are none. So natural ontology does not suffice for normative truth.

I will now argue that from a naturalistic perspective, the normative stance suffices to establish precisely these kinds of entailments: it provides an analysis of *normative semantics* (i.e. the truth-conditions, truth-values, and truth-makers of normative propositions) that establishes semantically grounded entailments from natural truths to normative truths.

   To see how, let us begin by assuming naturalism: that *all* there is in the world are the objects and properties posited by the natural sciences—fundamental particles and forces that in turn constitute us and other things (our bodies, nervous systems, and so on). Next, let us think about normativity from this perspective. Since naturalism focuses on what *is*—on how brains and nervous systems function, giving rise to behavior—naturalists will be antecedently inclined to think that normativity *just is* reducible to some kind of human cognition and behavior: specifically, to how we *use* normative terms and concepts (e.g. 'good', 'ought', etc.), including *semantic practices* for judging propositions containing them to be true or false. So let us think about these things: about how we use normative terms and concepts.

The first thing to note here is that 'normative behavior' is ubiquitous: we *say* that songs, tables, games of baseball, people, and so on, are 'good' or 'bad'; that there are ways people 'ought' to behave, play chess, etc.; that there are ways the world 'ought' to be; and so on. What we observe in the first instance, in other words, is people—through their uses of normative words and concepts—appearing to *take a normative stance* on natural things in the world around us. This stance appears to consist in our simply conceiving things in normative terms (our *thinking* some muffins are 'good', some people 'bad', and so on), and in turn our *saying* certain things, making normative ascriptions of various sorts (e.g. we *say* that such-and-such is 'a good bagel', so-and-so is a 'bad person', the 'world isn't as it should be', etc.). In other words, from naturalistic perspective, 'normativity' appears to be nothing more than a *set of behaviors* people engage in: thinking and calling things 'good', 'bad', etc.; having beliefs about how things and people 'should' or 'ought' to be, and so on.

Next, let us examine more deeply what exactly these behaviors (i.e. taking the normative stance) appear to involve. We not only call things 'good' or 'bad' and say how people 'should' or 'ought' to behave: we seem to do so according to certain kinds of cognitive and linguistic rules—that is, *semantic rules* that define (i) those concepts' satisfaction-conditions, (ii) the kinds of propositions that sentences containing those concepts express, (iii) their truth-conditions, and (iv) the 'truthmakers' for those propositions. To see what I mean, consider an example that I give in Arvan (2020, p. 127; see also Arvan 2016, p. 28). Anyone who understands the game of chess understands that there are good and bad moves that one can make in the game. We also think that players ought to make good moves, and ought not to make bad moves. These appear to be *true normative propositions* about how to play chess well. But now what is the nature of normative propositions like these? Although

the nature of propositions *per se* is controversial (see McGrath and Frank, 2020), following Frege (1892) perhaps the most natural way to understand them is in terms of *truth-conditions*. Insofar as propositions are what declarative sentences in a language express, and declarative statements can be true or false, it is natural to think that propositions are in some way reducible to their truth-conditions—that, for instance, the proposition *that p* is the proposition it is in virtue of the fact that it is *true* if and only if *p* (Cf. Davidson, 1967). So, then, let us ask—again, from a naturalistic perspective—how the truth-conditions of normative propositions are defined: that is, what their truth-conditions are *constituted* by. The answer seems clear: truth-conditions are simply *semantic rules* for evaluating the conditions under which a given statement is true or false (see Tarski's 1983 'T-schema'). But now just what are semantic rules from a naturalistic perspective? The answer is that they appear to be nothing more or less than '*cognitive-behavioral rules*'—that is, stable cognitive and behavioral patterns for deploying normative concepts, evaluating when those concepts are 'satisfied', and for evaluating the truth or falsity of propositions containing them; cognitive-behavioral patterns that in turn, because language itself is public, are ones that we *share* with other normative-language users and expect each other to abide by.

To see how, consider the fact that we have—and competent language users who understand chess tend to follow—a cognitive-behavioral rule of saying that a particular kind of move in chess is a 'good move' if and only if it, as a *purely descriptive matter*, that move has a strong propensity to help a player to win the game over an opponent. When a chess expert normatively evaluates a move in a game, saying it is good or bad (or alternatively, 'That's true, it was a very good move'), this is roughly the rule they will follow: they will *equate* the truth of 'X was a good move' with 'X is a move that has a propensity to help win the game

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against an opponent.' So, from a naturalistic perspective, normative semantics—that is, normative propositions, their truth-conditions, *and* their truth-makers—all appear to be nothing more or less then particular cognitive-behavioral semantic practices along with the kinds of natural, real-world conditions under which those practices deem normative statements to be true or false.

What we seem to do, in other words, when we adopt what I am calling the normative stance—that is, when we *take the stance* that something is good, bad, right, wrong, etc.—is to simply lay down and/or conform to cognitive-behavioral-semantic rules defining when a given normative concept ('good move in chess') is *satisfied* (viz. moves that enable a person to win a game), defining the *truth-conditions* for propositions involving it (i.e. 'That is a good move in chess' is true iff that move has a propensity to help the player to win the game'), as well as the *truth-makers* for those normative propositions (viz. the truth-maker for 'That is a good move in chess' is being a move that in fact has a propensity to help them win). Notice, as such, that on this analysis, there is a very real sense in which there are *true normative propositions*: there really are *good moves in chess*—for the simple reason our normative semantic rules identify conditions that constitute good moves, as such. So, the normative stance explanation of normativity does not eliminate the normative from our ontology. The normative is real: there are *bona fide* normative truths (things that are good, bad, etc.). It is just that those truths are in no way 'non-natural.' They are instead fully reducible to features of the natural world through genuine entailment relations: through our normative semantic practices *entailing* that normative truths are equivalent, via their truth-conditions and truth-makers, to complexes of natural facts. The normative stance, as such, bridges the 'is-ought gap' via a wholly naturalistic analysis of normative semantics. Finally—and this is crucial—

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if one comes to meta-ethics firmly wedded to a naturalistic worldview, then every step of this analysis should seem plausible: the normative stance (viz. setting and conforming to cognitive-behavioral rules for normative concepts, etc.) *just does* appear to be what we do when we use normative concepts and language; when we say or believe that some things are good or bad, evaluate normative propositions as true or false, and so on.

The next thing it seems a naturalist should do—following Dennett's strategy—is to try to explain in naturalistic terms *why* we engage in these psycho-semantic behaviors. Dennett's (1987, pp. 16-73) discussion of the 'design stance' would seem to be very helpful here. When adopting this stance, we can ask why a designer might make creatures who adopt the normative stance. Suppose, then, you were a designer of organisms. If you were to design organisms to deploy normative words and concepts such as 'good', 'bad', 'should', 'should not', and so on (laying down and conforming to semantic rules for so doing), why would you do so? One possible answer—the answer the normative non-naturalist favors—is that you would design organisms to deploy normative terms and concepts in order to respond to *objectively*, stance-independent normative features of the world (so that, for instance, the organisms you designed would more reliably pursue that which is *objectively* good, avoid the bad, etc.). And indeed, something like this explanation appears to underlie common philosophical defenses of normative reasons fundamentalism, normative non-naturalism, and 'robust' moral realism (see e.g. Scanlon, 1998, 2004; and Parfit 2011). Proponents of these views often argue that the 'face-value' of normative language is realist—that is, that normative language appears to posit stance-independent normative facts, such as facts about how people *ought* to act (which seems on its face to be different in kind than any naturalistic fact about what *is*). Non-naturalists then typically argue that the best explanation of these

features of moral language—in terms of intuitive plausibility, etc.—is that that there really *are* stance-independent, non-natural normative facts, including non-natural moral facts (see Brink, 1989; Cuneo, 2007; Enoch, 2011; Huemer, 2013; Parfit, 2011; Sayre-McCord, 1988; Shafer-Landau, 2003. Cf. Sinclair, 2012).

Recall, however, that our aim in the current context is to try to make sense of normativity from a purely naturalistic standpoint—examining how things will appear to a theorist who comes to meta-ethics firmly wedded to a naturalistic worldview: someone who firmly believes in the unique epistemic merits of naturalistic forms of inquiry (i.e. empirical science), and who thinks natural sciences are our best guide to ontology (that is, to which kinds of things exist). From a naturalist standpoint, the normative non-naturalist's view of normativity will appear to be deeply misguided. First and foremost, the naturalist will think that because empirical science does not posit non-natural normative facts, we have no good evidence that such things exist: we merely have good evidence for fundamental physical particles and forces, and the kinds of things (animals, people, etc.) that those fundamental physical entities constitute. Second, for reasons outlined above, the naturalist will contend that the normative stance can explain normativity in purely cognitive-behavioral terms, via a naturalistic analysis of normative semantics, and that because this explanation is wholly naturalistic, it is the *best* explanation. Finally, as I explain below, the naturalist can even explain in naturalistic terms why normative facts can seem stance-independent when they are not. The committed naturalist will thus think that we can explain everything about normativity that needs explaining in purely naturalistic, cognitive-behavioral terms.

We have already seen a part of the story as to why the naturalist will think these things, via the proposed reduction of normative semantics to the normative stance. However,

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we can further see why by imagining a *naturalist* adopting Dennett's design stance. If you rejected any appeal to preexisting (i.e. primitive, stance-independent, non-natural) normative facts, but instead wanted to explain why a designer might make organisms who used normative terms and concepts in ways that *appear* to talk about such ('non-natural') things, what kind of design explanation would you give? The clear place to begin here is to focus on the behavioral phenomena in question: the ways in which people *engage* in normative behavior, thinking things are (objectively) 'good', 'bad', and so on, ascribing normative terms to things, and affirming the truth and falsehood of different propositions involving normative terms. The question then is: why might a designer (or evolution) design creatures to engage in these behaviors even if, by hypothesis (assuming naturalism), there are no 'non-natural moral facts'? Here, the naturalist must search for an explanation for how it would be useful—evolutionarily, cognitively, and behaviorally—for creatures to use normative concepts in the ways we do. Let us ask, then, why normative concepts and language might be useful—evolutionarily, as well as from an individual organism's standpoint given their natural constitution. What is the normative stance—the stance we take when we judge and say that things are good, bad, etc.—plausibly *for*? What are its uses? We can begin by thinking about evolutionary history. What evolutionary function might the normative stance—conceptualizing things as 'good', 'bad' and so on—have? Several answers immediately present themselves.

First, normative language and concepts enable us to *evaluate* phenomena in our environment, in ways that are plausibly fitness-conducive in evolution (Churchland. 2011, pp. 6-7, 12-13). If you and I were hunters and gatherers on ancient plains, our being able to communicate about which foods, plants, or creatures, are 'good' or 'bad', that would be very

helpful indeed—as it would help oneself and one's kin *obtain* things beneficial to survival and reproduction and avoid things that hinder survival and reproduction.

Second, in a similar way, normative language and concepts not only plausibly made it easier for our ancestors to coordinate with each other, but also to *cooperate* with each other in ways that plausibly increased fitness. For example, if you, I, and our kin on the plains believed it 'good' to protect each other and not deceive each other—and if we could agree that 'good' arrowheads are sharp rather than dull—then we could plausibly cooperate more effectively as a group than individuals who did not take such a normative stance on things (Chuchland, 2011, chapters 3, 4, and 6).

Importantly, all of this would be true even if (*contra* e.g. Parfit, 2011) 'nothing really matters' in an objective, stance-independent sense. For example, even if survival does not 'objectively' matter (e.g. as a non-naturalistic normative fact), it would still obviously matter *to* our evolutionary ancestors whether they survived: that is, it would matter in the sense that they would *take the normative stance* that it does, calling things beneficial to their survival 'good' and those not 'bad' via normative semantic rules (because, again, their survival matters *to* them). Similarly, even if social cooperation does not objectively matter (viz. stance-independent non-natural normative facts), our ancestors may well have seen that relative to the normative stance they took on their own survival—that is, relative to fact that their survival and reproduction mattered *to* them—they 'should' take the same stance on social cooperation, *taking the stance* that it is a good means to survive and reproduce.

These are just a few plausible evolutionary advantages creatures might gain by adopting the normative stance, imputing 'goodness' and 'badness' and 'ought-ness' to things in the world without there (objectively, stance-independently) being *any* such properties in

the world. Now turn to a moral case. Suppose you are a parent giving moral instruction to your child. You tell your child, 'Hitting other children is wrong.' What are you trying to do, *when we consider this question from a naturalistic perspective*, in adopting this negative normative stance—a stance that, from the grammatical structure of the sentence, is in a certain sense 'categorical'? The answer, it seems, is that you are attempting to *categorically discourage* your child from hitting other children—that is, to discourage them from thinking it is *ever* an appropriate thing to do. But now why are you doing this? The non-naturalist may want to say that you are telling your child that because hitting other children *is* categorically wrong (as a non-natural moral fact). However, from a naturalistic perspective, there are again no grounds for appealing to non-natural normative facts here, and there is another ready explanation at hand. To see how, suppose your child asks (as they sometimes do) *why* they shouldn't hit other children. Chances are, if you are a parent, you will give some further explanation—one common one among parents being, 'How would you like it if other children hit you? You wouldn't like it at all. So, you shouldn't do it to them.' Notice that in a sense you seem to be 'giving the child a normative reason.' But in what *sense* are you doing this, on a naturalistic picture? Not by referring to objective (non-natural, stance-independent) normative matters of fact. Instead, you are in the first instance appealing to your child's *emotions and desires*—that is, to 'how they would feel' if someone treated them that way. But why? The obvious explanation, from a naturalistic perspective, is that in speaking to your child's perspective—to their emotions, wants, desires, etc.— you are trying get them to adopt *your* normative stance that 'hitting other children is (categorically) wrong.'

The same goes, on a naturalistic picture, for a philosopher who endorses a particular moral theory or principle, say Kant's Categorical Imperative. In endorsing such a principle,

you are, from a naturalistic perspective, doing nothing more or less than *adopting the normative stance* that the Categorical Imperative is objective and 'categorically' binding: that people 'should' obey it in all of their actions, regardless of what their contingent desires, inclinations, or values might be. Of course, it might seem to you that this is an objective, non-natural normative truth: namely, that people *really* (objectively, stance-independently) ought to obey the Categorical Imperative. However, from a naturalistic perspective, this is again clearly a step too far. We do not need to appeal to non-normative facts (such as that the Categorical Imperative is objectively true) to explain, from a naturalistic perspective, why it seems that way to you. All we need to do is to tell some plausible psychological story about why it seems to you that morality must be categorically binding. And here again the naturalist has a ready story to tell. As Luco (2016) argues, if we did not believe that moral requirements to be categorically binding, it would plausibly breed profound skepticism about moral requirements—something that many of us would not want to happen (as it matters *to* us whether people obey moral norms). So, the naturalist will say, we have strong psychological reasons to *take the stance* that moral requirements are categorical even if, in reality, they are no such thing (see Arvan, 2020, chs. 2-3 for an extended argument to this effect).

Finally, in a similar way, the naturalist can use the normative stance to explain away Moore's (1903)'s 'naturalistic fallacy.' Moore, again, argues that it is fallacious to explain what is good reductively (e.g. in naturalistic terms, such as desire-satisfaction) by reference to his 'open question argument', contending that for any naturalistic phenomenon, X, it is always a further, open question whether X is *good*. Moore takes this to show *the good* itself (i.e. intrinsic value) is primitive, ineffable, and stance-independent. Yet, the normative stance

provides an alternative interpretation of Moore's open-question argument: as human beings *taking the normative stance* that we can always ask whether a *particular* normative stance (e.g. the stance that desire-satisfaction is 'good') is the 'right' stance to adopt. The 'naturalistic fallacy', on this account, is simply a recursive result of the normative stance itself: it results from *taking the normative stance* that it is always an open question *which normative stance* one should take on a given phenomenon—which we might in turn plausibly chalk up to the general human propensity to *question everything*. But, if this naturalistic explanation of the open-question argument is correct, then that argument provides no evidence that the good is primitive and irreducible: Moore's argument at most shows that we are psychologically inclined to *take the normative stance* that the good has these properties.

Thus, in every case, it appears that the naturalist can explain normative phenomena, including the semantic value of normative statements (as true or false), in purely descriptive cognitive-behavioral terms: in terms of the normative stance and other natural facts. To be clear, this kind of naturalistic story may not seem 'plausible' to some inquirers—specifically, to inquirers who come to normative philosophy not already firmly committed to a naturalistic ontology and naturalistic methods. However, to the committed naturalist, none of these reservations about 'intuitive plausibility' should have any sway. For, as Dennett (rightly) points out, naturalists are simply not in the business of developing theories that 'seem plausible' or conform to 'commonsense' (Dennett, 1987, pp. 7-11). Many naturalistic theories (ranging from General Relativity to quantum mechanics) appear to have deeply counterintuitive consequences—yet they are consequences that naturalists will argue that we should accept given the epistemic advantages of naturalistic methods.

Finally, there are empirical grounds for the idea that normativity does fundamentally involve taking a stance. First, in childhood development, children initially do not appear to conceptually distinguish between what 'is' and what 'ought' to be. Children appear instead to simply equate what is desired or intended (e.g. 'I want candy') with the normative (e.g. 'It is bad if mommy denies me candy'), only learning that 'normative language implies objective reasons' later on (Coates, 1988). Second, even in adulthood there appears to be a close relationship between stance-dependence (i.e. an action's affective valence to an agent) and agents' normative judgments (i.e. repulsive things, like torture, are judged 'bad' or 'evil'): things that produce positive affect tend to result in *positive* normative stance and things that produce negative affect result in *negative* normative stance (Cabanac and Bonniot-Cabanac, 2007). Third, there are empirical grounds for thinking that the purpose of normative talk broadly is the one I have suggested: that we talk in terms of 'reasons' in order to persuade people to share our evaluative stance. For example, anti-abortionists argue that 'abortion is wrong' to get others to adopt the same *evaluative stance* toward the act (Mercier and Sperber, 2011, 2017).

2. The Problem with Non-Naturalist Counterarguments

Of course, non-naturalists see normativity very differently. They provide arguments that moral truths are mind-independent, normative reasons primitive, and normative properties non-natural. While cannot examine all of these arguments here, let us briefly examine some prominent claims that normative non-naturalists often make.

One moral realist argument is that when we judge (e.g.) that stealing is wrong, we do not appear to be merely taking a stance on stealing: we appear to be making a judgment about an objective fact, the *wrongness of stealing,* where its wrongness is something we take

to be stance-*independent* (Sinclair, 2012). A second, related argument is that the normative stance fails to cohere with moral phenomenology: namely, the way in which our basic moral intuitions appear direct and unmediated. For example, if I see someone being tortured, I do not experience myself as merely taking a stance on torture: I seem to directly *intuit torture's wrongness* (Audi, 2013). A third argument is that normative reasons must be primitive because they are unexplainable in terms of anything more basic (Scanlon, 1998; Parfit, 2011, p. 31). A fourth argument is that normative reasons must be primitive to play a 'suitable' justificatory role with the right kind of normative 'authority' (Scanlon, 1998, 2014; Parfit 2011; Cf. Dasgupta, 2017). Finally, normative non-naturalists tend to simply find naturalistic analyses of normativity implausible, taking the normative and non-normative to be obviously 'too different' for the former to be reducible to the latter. As Enoch writes:

> Because only normative truths can answer normative questions I ask myself in deliberation, nothing less than a normative truth suffices for deliberation...And because the kinds of normative facts that are indispensable for deliberation are just so different from natural, not-obviously-normative facts and truths, the chances of a naturalistic reduction seem rather grim (Enoch, 2007, p. 44).

These are by no means the only arguments for normative non-naturalism. However, it should be immediately evident that as forceful as these types of concerns may appear to the non-naturalist, to the committed naturalist they will lack any real argumentative force—as the normative stance will seem capable of explaining away the relevant concerns in wholly naturalistic terms. First, the naturalist may note that human psychology presents many things to us in ways they are not. For example, it *seems* phenomenologically that we make undetermined free choices—yet, as hard determinists argue, this may be a cognitive illusion.

Similarly, the Earth *seems* flat to everyday perception when, as we all know, its flatness is a perceptual illusion generated by the size of the Earth and small curvature relative to an observer standing on its surface. By a similar token, the normative stance can explain away the *apparent* stance-independent objectivity of normative reasons—including the apparent objectivity of moral truths or 'intrinsic value'—in terms of roughly what Dennett calls a 'user-illusion' (Dennett, 1991, chapter 10, §4): a kind of cognitive illusion wherein normative (moral) reasons *appear* to be objective because we are psychologically impelled to *take the stance* that they are. Second, on that note, the naturalist will point out that human beings tend to have remarkably similar basic interests and emotional responses: most of us want to stay alive, to be free from being killed or stolen from, feel sympathy for others and anger toward thieves and murderers, and so on. Third, the naturalist can plausibly argue that these interests and emotional responses often lead us to adopt the normative stance in an apparently direct and unmediated way, as when we simply have the immediate reaction that 'torture is wrong', *adopting the normative stance* that it is objectively wrong as a 'moral fixed point' (Cf. Cuneo and Shafer Landau, 2014; Cf. Killoren, 2016a)—where what is really going on is that we are having a strong negative psychological reaction that merely leads us to *take the stance* that the action is (objectively, stance-independently) wrong. Fourth, as noted earlier, the naturalist can even tell a plausible story about how, in this way, the normative stance we take on phenomena—both our snap judgments and more deliberative, reflective ones—routinely results in our *believing* that moral requirements are categorically normatively binding or 'inescapable' (see Joyce, 2001), when in reality this is not the case (at least not stance-independently). For example, when I feel 'sick to my stomach' witnessing an act of torture (which I do when watching or imagining fictional examples thereof), the

naturalist can plausibly say that this immediately leads me to *adopt the stance* that the action is categorically wrong in a way that I find psychologically 'inescapable'—leading me to take the normative stance that torture *is* categorically wrong, as well as the stance that others should adopt the same normative stance toward it that I do. Why do we adopt *that* stance (imputing categorical normativity to moral reasons)? Here again, as noted earlier, the naturalist can tell a plausible social-psychological story. As Luco (2016) argues, the idea that moral norms are categorically binding has a unique psychological force: when someone sincerely believes that something is *categorically wrong*, they may be more motivated to avoid doing it than they would if they failed to adopt such an absolute stance on the action in question. Since most of us want people to follow moral norms—and we have visceral emotional reactions (such as horror or disgust) when they do not—we have fairly obvious psychological reasons to take the stance that moral requirements are objective, categorical, and stance-independent *even if they are not*. And indeed, as Killoren (2016b) puts it, 'robust moral realism' (the view that moral truths are non-natural, stance independent normative facts) can be understood as something like a religion: as a kind of normative faith akin to faith in God—a pervasive belief and commitment to the idea that moral reasons are non-natural, objective, and stance-independent, even if as a matter of fact (if naturalism is true) there are no such things.

In sum, because believing that moral norms are objective and mind-independent imputes to them a special kind of 'categorical' force—and because well-functioning societies arguably depend on people treating moral norms as having such force—the naturalist can explain why we are psychologically disposed to impute such 'categorical', 'non-natural', 'mind-independent' properties to moral propositions, even when no such things actually

exist. The naturalist's answer is simple: we *take the normative stance* that moral truths have these (non-natural) properties, and for fairly obvious psychological reasons. Finally, the naturalist may emphasize something that moral realists, normative reasons fundamentalists, and normative non-naturalists tend to downplay: namely, that there is actually considerable variance about whether normative (and moral) judgments present *as* objective and mind-independent. For example, recent empirical research indicates that many laypeople do not experience moral judgments as 'objective' (Beebe and Sackris, 2016). Indeed, there are entire classes of human beings—psychopaths, career criminals, and terrorists—who do not appear to 'see' the (objective) rightness or wrongness of behaviors the rest of us judge these ways. The normative stance readily explains these things in terms of individual psychological variance, such as a lack of innate or learned empathy leading particular individuals or populations: *we* take the normative stance that murder is wrong; psychopaths do not.

Thus, the naturalist will find the non-naturalist's objections to the normative stance explanation of normativity to be problematically question-begging (Cf. Fleming, 2015). From the naturalist's perspective, none of the grounds that the non-naturalist appeals to in objecting to the normative stance constitute *good* grounds for doubting that it can serve as an adequate explanation of normativity.

Conclusion

This article has not shown that the normative stance is the true explanation of normativity, including moral normativity. It has merely argued that *if* one comes to meta-ethics firmly wedded to a naturalistic worldview, then the normative stance should appear to explain everything about normativity that needs explaining, including how normative propositions

can be genuinely true or false; why normative reasons (including 'the good') may seem primitive, objective, and non-natural; why normative moral reasons may seem 'categorical'; how the 'is-ought gap' is illusory; and so on. We then saw that if one comes to meta-ethics *not* firmly convinced by naturalism, then one may find the normative stance explanation of normativity implausible. Finally, however, we saw that non-naturalist arguments against the normative stance explanation of normativity should carry no real evidential weight to committed naturalists. This paper's findings are thus important in two related respects. First, naturalists should take the normative stance to be a promising meta-ethical analysis of normativity. Second, whether it is a true theory of normativity is something that can only be ascertained by determining which background hypotheses—naturalistic or otherwise—we should have when doing meta-ethics.

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